

IJAZ UL HASSAN

The Way It Was

VOLUME I



Ch. cent
w/m
Love
31 - 7.25

The Way It Was

VOLUME I

Mian Ijaz ul Hassan

First published in Pakistan 2025

Any part of this book may be used for educational purposes, reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the author.

Layout & Design

By



**'With gratitude
And love
Dedicated to my parents.'**

Also by the author:
Painting in Pakistan

Contents

Part I:

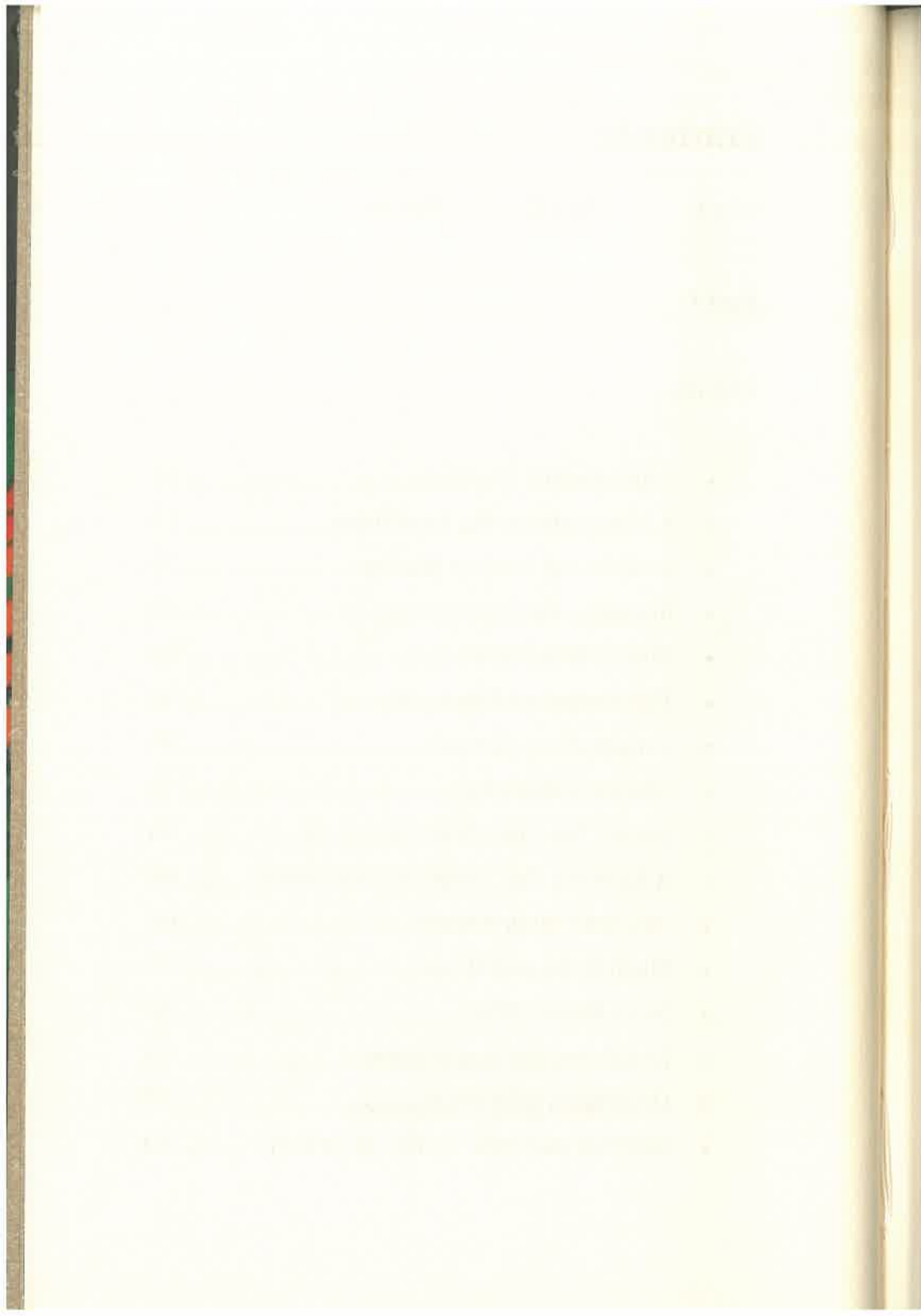
Part II:

Part III:

Part I:

Preface

- Artist and his Freedom 15
- A Substitute for the Real Thing 19
- Infidels and Brother Muslims 24
- Breaking a Rock with Eggs 29
- How to Win Freedom 33
- The Absurd and Absurdity 40
- *Tangan bhan dian gay*..... 44
- Cows and Buckets 49
- Gelded Art and Gilded Capitalism 54
- *A Kankar* a Day Keeps the Devil Away..... 60
- 'We can't Blink it More' 64
- Much Wind and Music 70
- Not a Proper War 76
- Jinnah and the Bag of Jewels 81
- Otherwise, All is Well 87
- Stability and Poise in Things at Rest 91



Preface

Just as Ijaz ul Hasan's art reflects his keen sense of observation, so does his writing. The multiple layers of meaning one discerns in every leaf he paints is echoed in the myriad themes he writes on. *The Way It Was* is a collection of Ijaz's columns published in *The Friday Times* over a period of several years. While many of the columns are topical in relation to the time frame they were written in, they retain the readers' interest because of the perspective the writer brings to the subject.

Writing on his own love of nature, and terming it as "the richest raw material for art and literature", he goes on to reflect:

"Nature is a flirt, ever eager to reveal. An artist on his part should have a wandering eye, ever alert to these revelations. There are subjects that can be painted over and over again. For instance, there is this jaman with vine clasped to its trunk outside our bedroom window... It is quite amazing how a familiar subject can constantly change its appearance. The moment you feel you have captured them, they present themselves in another guise, every season, every moment of day. It is an irresistible, constant provocation."

The above extract is from a column written in December 2005 and yet it remains timeless. There are several articles in this collection that dwell on the wonders of nature. In fact, Ijaz's paintings focus on nature primarily and his articles appear, in fact, to carry a corresponding thread in the written word. But whether it is his writing or his art, they are not simply pretty portraits created to please the reader or the viewer. Ijaz is a deeply committed, political person, even spending time in prison for his beliefs.

In *The Way It Was*, the reader gets a glimpse of the writer's political commitments. These are not in your face political commentary but nuanced observations on the state of Pakistan and the developments that give us reason to despair – or to hope. His columns on the ordinary people of Pakistan – their generosity or their idiosyncrasy – are warm-hearted and full of empathy. Those on the shenanigans of the powerful tell a different story.

The collection of articles includes several on Ijaz's own experience of politics and political figures. In *Forging a Myth*, he pays tribute to the memory of Salman Taseer recalling him as an elegant young man in "drainpipes" – an epitome of style at the time. Other articles also refer to his long association with the Pakistan People's Party and its members. But it is his writings on art and artists that have a special sense of intimacy to them. He appears to be happiest in the company of artists and their work.

Ijaz frequently uses allegories and folktales in his writings. These columns delight the reader with their storytelling style and the most difficult issues suddenly become clearer and more relevant.

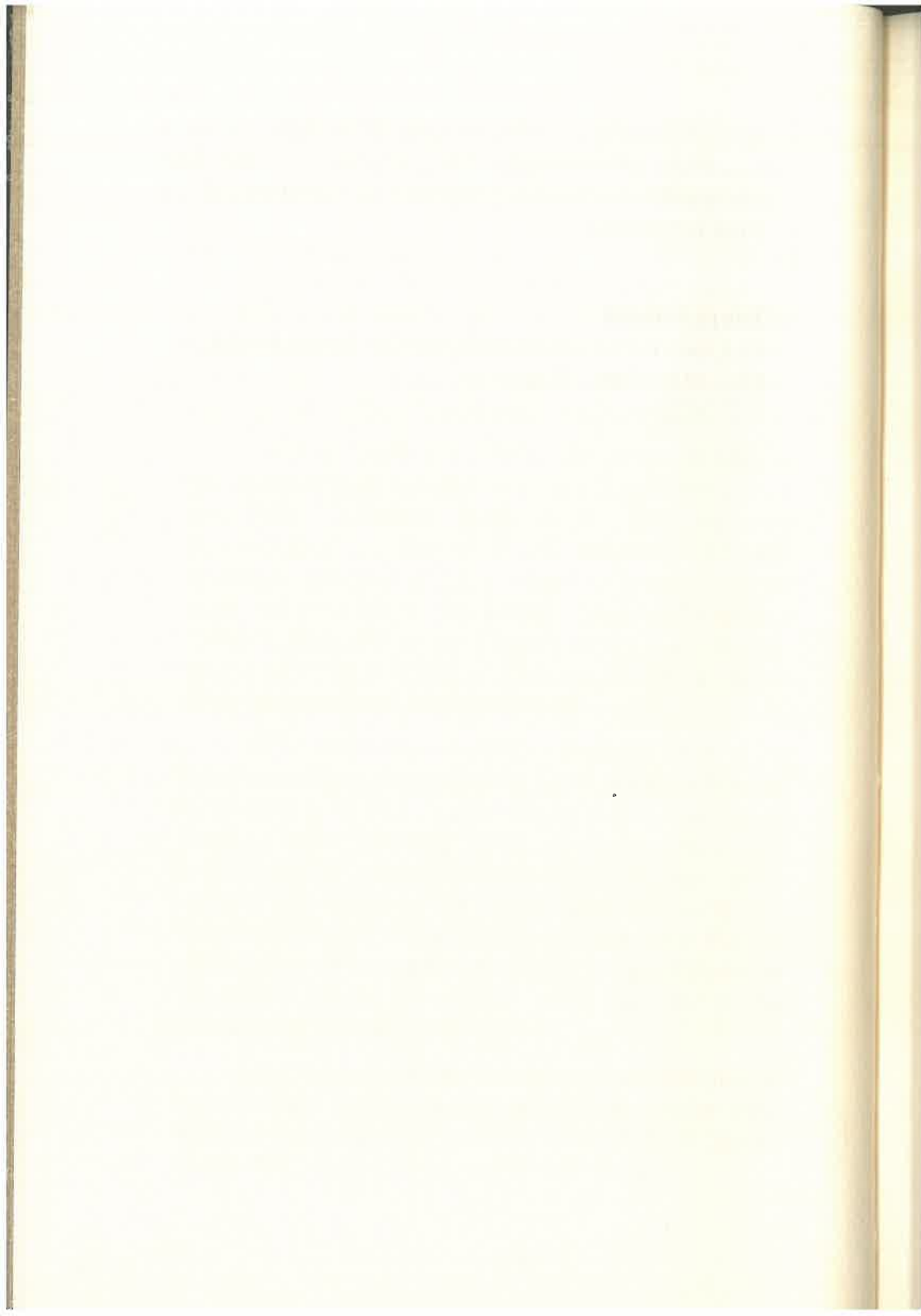
The Way It Was, in spite of its title, is not a collection of nostalgia. The articles are not just comments on what has happened but questions about what is to come.

Zohra Yousaf

Ex-Chair Person, Human Rights Commission Pakistan

Ex-Editor, Dawn Magazine

8-7-2022



Part I:

Vignettes of an Era:

Unfolding Stories from the Mid-
Century



Artist and his Freedom

"The Greeks had great respect for art and philosophy. When they lost faith in philosophy and lofty ideals, their civilisation, which had shined so brightly for centuries, almost instantly dimmed and then extinguished forever."

I wonder what the western artist must do if he cannot escape the awesome pull and power of the market. He should, I suppose, continue to work within the system while striving against its materialistic values and its cold heart. At least till such time that he is declared 'jealous' of the American way of life and branded *persona non grata*, in current lingo what they call a terrorist.

The materialistic philosophy of capitalism is inherently anti-art. Has anyone heard of an artist dying of hunger and poverty before the barons of industry and commerce replaced the old order, which of course had come to its end and needed to be replaced? Most artists that are celebrated today were in their lifetime spurned by the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie first established its roots in the low countries of Europe. Take, for instance, Holland.

The merchants had played a major role in the nationalist fight for independence from Spanish rule. They occasionally commissioned portraits but did not have a tradition of wider artistic concerns. Artists, as a consequence, were forced to adopt new vocations to support themselves as it is with most of our traditional artists and master craftsmen, who forced by adverse social circumstances, encourage their young to set up shops or apply for petty jobs. Rembrandt is regarded as one of the greatest Dutch painters. Only a few can match his mastery in expressing surface textures and the manner in which he drowns his figures in shadows, to create pensive moods and dramatic contrasts. A shirt sleeve, a creased forehead, a gaunt face, frail hands with network of veins, a sagging old face, speculative eyes focussed on the viewer, are richly painted with skilful brushwork and a deep insight.

Recently a Rembrandt self-portrait, which lay undiscovered for three centuries, because it had been painted over, was sold for 6,949,600 pounds at an auction in London. Rembrandt painted this rather flamboyant portrait of himself when he was 28. Little did he know then that he would die uncelebrated and poor? And what happened to the other great Dutch artist Van Eyck? In the winter that he died of malnutrition and neglect, some of his poor neighbours, helped to collect some coal to keep him from freezing to death. There is little consolation in the fact that he died in a warm bed. It is difficult to imagine that the numerous officials and wealthy

burgers he painted in their rich clothes and armour could have forgotten that he ever existed.

I must say that while we in Pakistan may forget our artists and men of letters when they are alive, we never forget to celebrate them in their death. Good riddance, most of them were a pain in their lifetime, anyway.

A third great Dutch painter who comes to mind was Van Gogh. He lived the last years of his life in Paris. Throughout his career his younger brother Theo supported him. He was never noted for being an artist in his life. Van Gogh lived an abject poor life on dole from his brother and died a destitute.

Some years back, the Dutch established a museum in Amsterdam to honour the great artists. If Van Gogh had been alive, he would not have had the money to buy a ticket to visit the museum dedicated to him. Gauguin, the French painter Van Gogh greatly admired, found himself so lost in his own country that he finally retreated to the Polynesian Island in the Pacific Ocean.

Admittedly Cézanne, who is regarded as the father of modern painting, was a misanthrope and a cantankerous person. As an old man, he collapsed and died carrying his canvas and easel on his back, coming down a dusty road. These celebrated artists were unable to live by their work. A prospective client was once sizing up Cézanne's painting and wished he could buy one of the apples painted on it. Anxious that the client might change his mind, Cézanne instantly cut

out the apple from the canvas and presented it to him. This is the story of each and every painter after the old regime was overthrown and replaced by the bourgeoisie. The image of the starving artist is the creation of the same era. The artist had never starved before. Leonardo died in the arms of the French emperor.

In ancient past the artist had worked somewhat closely with the state. The great Pericles of Athens who had built the Parthenon for the goddess Athena, after which the city is named, had close and warm friendship with the great sculptor Phydias. Among other works that Phydias carved were the statue of Athena, now lost, and the famous frieze girdling the temple, part of which still survives. Sections of the frieze were appropriated by Lord Elgin and transported to England, where they were kept in the custody of the British Museum. The Elgin marbles as they are called, are now being returned to Greece. It is tragic that many of our historical artefacts especially the Gandhara statues and friezes, robbed by some of our own well-placed criminals, were sold and smuggled out, will never return home.

The Greeks had great respect for art and philosophy and held their painters, carvers, poets, actors and playwrights in high esteem. When they lost faith in philosophy and lofty ideals, their civilisation, which had shined so brightly for centuries, almost instantly dimmed and then extinguished forever.
(22 July 2003)

A Substitute for the Real Thing

Some people believe that men aspiring to greatness must transcend the common, everyday events and ponder over issues of larger cosmological proportions. Some others contend that man is what he does; actions make a man.

How can an artist or a writer these days merely reminisce about the past or dilate over his aesthetic or private inner life when he can smell the stench of rotting flesh, hear tragic chants of wailing women, peer at the gory sights of decimated human bodies spread like litter – flesh stuck to walls, limbs dangling from ceiling fans. Can an artist detach himself from such events and indulge in esoteric pursuits? Art ultimately is the product of an artist's actions that generate mental processes. But the question is: What should concern the artist since art is neither a commodity nor merely an end in itself.

A distinctive aspect of modern art has been that it has lived off itself. One art movement lives off from the previous one; the second causes the third. It spurns description and yet depends for its own existence on words. The periods of modernism and

now post-modernism are glutted with endless tracts of verbosity and inventive jargon by which the trivial can be elevated, the trite can be imbued with profound meaning and vice versa.

Are events in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq a legitimate subject for painting? Why were the cubists, who evolved an inventive bold method with which they could express the profound new ideas of their time and address important events, content with painting bottles and guitars? Even the great Picasso after painting the *Guernica* and the rather timid presentation of the Korean War, regressed into making playful forays into formal dimensions of his creative deliberations.

I salute the photographers who, armed with loaded video cameras, have the courage to be in the heat of battle, frequently caught between the crossfire. In the old days it took months, sometimes years before a distant event would reach one. The slow pace of information helped exonerate those who could have been held responsible for shirking intervention. The German Jews were herded to gas chambers by the thousands but the world came to know of it years later. I believe the Allies knew but feigned ignorance.

Today, ignorance can't be an excuse. Everything is happening on the television screen. The media is controlled and manipulated but there are enough honest journalists who are not afraid to report truth, often at the cost of their own lives. The art, today, more than ever before, cannot be considered an inherited or

an acquired creative skill: it has to be physically lived and acted out. I recall an hour-long documentary produced by the BBC on the events in Bosnia titled 'Two Hours from London'. About eight to 10 cameramen lost their lives in filming the brutal assaults and 'cleansing' of the Bosnian people. It was not fiction based on reported events but live events. And yet it was more intense and moving than 'Apocalypse Now', that employed reportage as primary means to narrate events and advance the plot.

In the last scene of 'Two Hours from London' the camera zooms onto a young woman draped on a bench; dazed and lost in a trance. There is no other human or living thing in sight; the neighbourhood has been reduced to rubble. A battered apartment building with shattered windows and gaping holes stares in silent disbelief. A stray polythene bag and fragments of paper roll float across the town square in the freezing draught. If there were a brass band playing in the distance, it would have transformed the scene into a veritable Federico Fellini presenting aslice of experience leaving us to make up our own mind. But in this case in the tradition of neo-realism it is unambiguous in presenting pain, human suffering and waste, ensuing from upsurge of madness among a herd of humans: the irresistible urge to kill and purge those who practice a different faith.

There is an indistinguishable line that separates civilisation from barbarism, sanity from dementia, but each human must be judged for what he does, and his

actions make him what he is. I wonder if in the case of 'Two Hours From London', Michelangelo Antonioni would have quipped as he did about Vittorio de Sica that if he had made 'Bicycle Thieves' Antonioni would have told us more about the man and less about the bicycle.

For many years now, in fact for centuries, man has been led to believe that he was something special, because he could reason; he had invented science and was able to distinguish what was good for him, the society and the world as a whole. Man aspired to be larger than himself. He tried to explain his actions in a moral context. Literature is full of vivid examples where heroes are made to pay the price for their aberrations, even when they are inadvertently committed. In the Greek world, protagonists may repent but there is no forgiveness. In the Christian Europe's literature and cinema, a recurring theme has been the Fall of Man and his Redemption. In the modern times it has been increasingly questioned whether individual redemption was possible by penance or living a virtuous life.

Philosopher-poets have awfully complicated our lives by redefining individual responsibility. The balloon of intimate individual existence, inflated with personal dreams and aspirations, has been pricked by an enhanced collective awareness. Individual redemption today is only possible through collective human struggle to redeem itself from pain and degradation inflicted by tyrants. Where must

everyone stand in this landscape is a matter that each must judge individually. What must a poet or a painter address is a question to which each writer and artist must find his own answer.

I am here once again reminded of Antonioni. In 'The Eclipse' when the heroine who is open to experience is confronted by substitutes for the real thing, which is all the bourgeois society can offer her, she says in the end, "We don't have to know each other to love, and perhaps we don't have to love..." Penelope Houston adds, "The eclipse of the emotions casts its shadow and when finally darkness descends on a street corner it is as though a world was ending." Let us not let that happen.

(25 May, 2004)

Infidels and Brother Muslims

Most Pakistanis live in some Muslims countries on worker visas have a sharp contradiction with the locals, but the Mullah praises them for being our Muslim Brothers. People that give you equal rights of citizenship are branded as infidels those that deny you the status are embraced as brothers. What impeccable logic?

We are unfortunately divided about our identity. There are some who desist from linking themselves to South Asian history. They insist that their history does not go beyond Mohammad bin Qasim. They go as far as to assert that Pakistan was created the day the young Arab general stepped on the shores of Sindh. Surely this is rather far fetched. Neither the Sultans of Delhi nor the Mughals had any such thing on their agenda. This view of history is certainly outlandish, but generations have been fed on it. It was part of the school syllabus, and probably still is. The *fundo* lobby threatens the nation with violence if a word is changed in the syllabus and the mighty rulers cannot take a stand against it. They disappear, coarsely put, like 'froth of piss in sand'. Even the history taught at the

college level and some universities excludes the pre-Muslim period. No wonder many of us are so ignorant. Zia and the rabid clergy have so outrageously distorted our South Asian Muslim identity that I sometime wonder if it can ever be put right.

Also remarkable is the insistence of many members of the privileged class to deny their local origins and to trace them to the Middle East. It becomes quite tiresome to listen to their claims that their forefathers rode in from Basra, Balkh or Bukhara or some other place abroad. So, what if they did? It is crass of those fattened on the Indus fat to deny belonging to the land where they were born and bred; to make it a point to have it known that they are not South Asians. Even if their ancestors abandoned their own homelands for a future in India hundreds of years ago, is it not about time they called themselves South Asians?

The Hindu *fundos* seek to justify their assertion that Muslims are outsiders by citing these Muslims who are constantly denying their links to the soil. Most of the South Asian Muslims, as is abundantly clear, are as indigenous as the Hindus. If Muslims are outsiders, then logically so are the Aryan Hindus who poured in from the shores of the Caspian into Iran and then into India. Some of them even came directly. If we proceed with the same perspective into the distant past we would be running into the Dravidians, the pre-Dravidians and back to the *homo erectus* and his *homo sapien* ancestors who walked from Africa to Asia.

Who can then claim to be the original South Asian? In reality the whole argument is foolish and stupid. If new saplings cease to take root in a forest - howsoever proud and magnificent - the forest would soon perish. South Asia is culturally rich precisely on account of its ethnic and spiritual diversity. Since the very original resident is not around should we not postpone the debate till the time we can have him amongst us. In the meantime, let us keep our peace and try individually to improve and in the process define a more humane and inclusive identity.

The debate about the old and the new reminds me of a close-door political party meeting. Some old workers felt their positions threatened by new, more zealous workers. One of their spokesmen, who enjoyed submissive loyalty of a group of old workers, persisted in defending them without reason so that they could cling on to party offices. He rounded up the rhetoric with the familiar adage, "Old is gold!" By now I had, had enough of it, so I rather irritably intervened. Yes, I confessed that there were some things that in course of time become old and valuable and are consequently either deposited in the vaults of a bank or put on display in museums. But there were many things that did not age well with time. They rusted and rotted, or started to malfunction. Perforce these had to be melted down or broken and delivered to Bilal Ganj, the local old spares market. What was to be done with an old party worker? Logically, if he was old and valuable he was to be respected. But if he had become a thorn in the side then he had to be removed. Being

old by itself does not become a virtue. It is about time the *fundos* on both sides of the border realised that they have become redundant; a pain to their respective societies; a thorn in the side; a nail in the shoe.

Some of us Pakistanis have a problem integrating with people who are different from us culturally. When Bosnians took refuge in Pakistan, some *mullahs* said that they were not proper Muslims because their women wore skirts. We are never tired of speaking against the West that allows us citizenship, but extol virtues of some Muslim countries that treat our citizens as if they were garbage. Most Pakistanis who live in these countries on worker visas have a sharp contradiction with the locals, but the *Mullah* praises them for being our Muslim Brothers. People that give you equal rights of citizenship are branded as infidels and countries that deny you the status are embraced as brothers. What impeccable logic?

A young man I know worked for a company in Kuwait, when it was invaded by Iraq. Like everyone else he took off with his family towards the nearest border post. At the crossing the border police impounded his car for not having the requisite documents. How he managed to arrive in Lahore with his wife and kids is a story for another occasion. When he called on me in Lahore, he said he had lost everything he possessed and then to my great surprise added, "The Kuwaitis deserved what they got." I quote

him not because I agreed with him but to illustrate the affection in which he held his fellow Muslim brothers of the country where he worked.

(13 Oct. 2004)

Breaking a Rock with Eggs

In solitary confinement she wrote, 'Angrily I am trying to write on the cement wall with the bottom of my spoon that we are born to suffer because we are born in the Third World Time. Time and place are imposed upon us, so let us be patient as there is no other choice.' (Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Prize, 2003). The late Eqbal Ahmed once recounted what a Vietnamese freedom fighter said when asked to define a revolution: 'A revolution is like breaking a rock with eggs.' He implied that anyone seriously committed to bringing about a socio-political change needed to have, above all, an inexhaustible reserve of patience.

This reminds me of an episode recently recounted at a political conference that once a fisherman arrived at a river to catch fish. There, he was puzzled to see a person flinging stones at a tiger. The tiger was desperately trying to drink water on the bank across the river. As soon as he would extend his long tongue to lap up some water, the man would hurl a missile at him. The tiger would be distracted and shy back from the muddy edge of the river. This went on and on. The fisherman stood baffled. This crazy fellow was for no apparent reason or purpose wasting his

time and energy throwing stones at the mighty beast. The tiger scurried left and right to avoid the missiles that landed near him; exasperated growling at the man on the other side. There was little else he could do but snarl and growl at him from across the gushing waters.

The fisherman couldn't resist any more and asked the man hurling stones why he was doing it? 'You know very well that you can neither hurt him nor succeed in scaring him away,' the fisherman said. The man gave the fisherman a broad smile and with a sweating brow and flushed face replied, 'Brother I know I can't hurt him, *magar mein we ainoon deek la kay panee nahin peen dyan ga*' (but I will also not let him drink water in one gratifying draught). It is a rather graphic manner of strengthening individual resolve that often easily gives up. In the end it is really not what you have achieved but what you have done to achieve it – how many eggs you have broken to crack a rock. There is a Chinese fable where a foolish old man actually moved a mountain. A firm resolve can make anything happen.

But a few words of caution. These days with the war against terrorism throwing eggs at a rock can be attributed to a predilection for terrorism. Still, the other day I threw caution to the winds when I included in one of my recent murals the image of a young lad, barely nine, flinging a stone at an awesome tank racing towards him. Who would not be reminded of David, the great Biblical hero from the Old Testament?

The artists of the Italian Renaissance have conceived the image of David in many different ways. Donatello and Verrocchio have cast him in bronze as a young boy. Lorenzo Medici commissioned both statues. Donatello's David was completed in 1430. It stands 5 feet, 2 inches in height. The introspective mood of his David, however, makes him inscrutable and eludes precise narrative context and meaning. David, conceived by Verrocchio, which was cast 35 years later in 1465, is only 4 feet and 2 inches in height but more assertive in attitude. In comparison to these two bronze statues of young David, Michelangelo's David, carved out of a single block of marble in 1501, is a young man of heroic proportions at 14 feet and 2 inches in height and is conceived as the defiant hero of the Florentine Republic. He is not depicted like the David of the 15th century masters after victory, with Goliath's severed head at his feet but staring over his left shoulder watchful of his approaching foe. It was commissioned by the town of Florence to be placed at the entrance to the city looking up the road leading into the town as a warning to the enemies of Florence. Appropriately enough while Michelangelo's David has the face of a classical hero, he has large feet, a taut body and hands of a butcher. In contrast to self-contained statues of Donatello and Verrocchio, the David of Michelangelo stands in a 'posture of tense expectation' ready to pounce and slaughter.

There are many other images of David conceived by European painters – there is one by Bernini for instance, with features tensely concentrated

extending into real space towards an unseen Goliath. It has a rare feeling of immediacy and a sense of urgency.

There was a time heroes and villains could be easily separated, but unfortunately these days they can be more easily interchanged – butchers into saviours and villains into heroes. On a lighter note, the good news is that art experts are half way through giving Michelangelo's David his first bath in more than a century. But the sad news is that he is getting weak at the ankles – imagine standing vigilantly and patiently on your feet for 500 years. There is no fear that he may fall. In fact, there is no fear that he will ever fall. The spirit lives on.

(13 March 20004)

How to Win Freedom

"The Pakistani artist has no patrons and can be said to be free. But freedom has its own problems. To begin with, it needs to be exercised. The establishment doesn't either have a strategy or the strength to absorb any form of political opposition."

The concept of the starving genius is a creation of modern times. Even a casual student of art history will not be able to recall men of talent dying of neglect in the old times. It is interesting to note how the concept of the starving artist is put to profitable use by critics and art galleries.

First the bourgeois society starves an artist out of disregard and then, when he has been safely buried, makes capital by romanticising him as a rebel. The last thing capitalism desires is rebelliousness, but supports it when it can be profitable. It encourages innovation and novelty in art and in other spheres of production but not dissent. Poverty for the bourgeoisie is synonymous with evil, but it is incredible how the galleries have been able to market it, by idealising the sufferings of the poor. Like charity, it helps the consumer to ease their conscience.

In ancient times, Socrates took the poisoned cup not because authority spurned him but because he would not forsake his ideals. Political enemies of Pericles treacherously poisoned his friend, the great Phidias. It was not that the perpetrators of this heinous crime were unappreciative of Phidias's greatness as a sculptor, but believed that his unexpected death would make Pericles's heart fester.

There were many artists who liked wielding a sword and got killed, but they never died unheeded. Marlowe, the great precursor of Shakespeare, for instance, was slain in a sword fight over a woman, which brought his successful career to a rather abrupt end, leaving the stage vacant for Billy. But as long as he lived, Marlowe was regarded as the superstar of Elizabethan theatre.

Artists were greatly prized and honoured in the Old World. The kings after losing a fight and having their cities sacked, were required to pay tribute money and hand over a few artists of merit. It may please the reader if I narrate an account, which concerns Mohammad II, the great grandfather of Suleiman the Magnificent, who captured Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453.

Some years later he waged war against Venice, which came to an end in 1479. Soon after, we are told, an ambassador from Venice brought some portraits painted by Venetian artists to the court. The 'Grand Turk' was filled with wonder and amazement. The Sultan ceaselessly praised the artists and requested

that a master be sent for. The Signoria of Venice immediately obliged by sending Gentile Bellini to Istanbul. Gentile on arrival presented Mohammad II with a 'lovely picture', which pleased the Sultan so much that he wondered 'how a mortal man could possibly possess such divine talent as to be able to express natural things so vividly.'

Among other works, which Gentile painted was a remarkable portrait of Mohammad II himself. After a while the Sultan, with a heavy heart permitted Bellini to go back to Venice, but not before, as the legend goes, pointing out to Gentile, that the manner in which a head severed from the neck depicted in battle scene was not rendered truthfully. The simple Gentile Bellini politely begged to disagree, at which the Sultan instantly ordered a demonstration.

A head was sliced off and the sultan gently asked Gentile to 'look!' The 'Grand Turk' was obviously right. The gentle Gentile should have known that the mighty Sultan had seen more heads fly off than Bellini had chops for a meal in his lifetime.

Gentile was sent off with innumerable gifts, the honour of a knighthood and a letter of recommendation. Among other gifts and privileges accorded to Bellini, 'by the lord of the country, a golden chain worked in the Turkish fashion and weighing 250 gold crowns was placed on his neck.'

On Gentile's return the entire city was delighted at the honour rendered to his skill by Mohammad. The Doge and the Senate decreed that 200 crowns per year

be paid to Gentile, which he continued to receive for the rest of the year. This is how friends and foes treated artists who transcended transient military and political squabbles.

Buonaroti Michaelangelo ceaselessly chiselled marble statues and painted frescoes for the Medici's and the reigning pontiffs of the church. They would not let him out of their sight. Leonardo de Vinci the second, great giant of the Italian High Renaissance felt inclined to leave Italy, but is said to have died in the arms of the French Emperor. The inimitable Velazquez and even the notorious Goya had access to the Spanish king and chambers of the royal household. The Mughal Emperor Jahangir took immense pride in his ability to identify the individual style of most of his court painters, even in paintings that had been created and worked by more than one hand. Many of the Chinese emperors and monarchs wrote poetry, some even painted; almost all prized the company of artists and men of learning.

It is said that while a famous calligrapher was inscribing a verse on paper, the reigning caliph held the bottle of ink for him. The Caliph was fascinated to see how the *Khattat* formed letters and shaped words into sentences. The spontaneous ease and aesthetic refinement demonstrated by the artist so delighted the *Khalifa* that he said with some sadness, "This art will die once you are gone?"

The great *Khattat* modestly replied, "My lord there will be many to replace me, if there are Caliphs

like you willing to hold their ink pots." Gulgee, our reputed artist, recently recounted this episode, but he could only remember the name of the famous calligrapher and not of the Caliph, which at the moment I cannot recall. But the point is that in the past, artists had an established function in society, and were respected. With the emergence of the bourgeoisie as the ruling class, artist was alienated and lost his integrated undisputed social standing.

The political change in France, like in Holland, pushed the artist out of Versailles, on to the Parisian streets. The new revolutionary rulers demonstrated much interest in art. The form and content of art changed almost overnight. But the emerging bourgeoisie had little regard for art and ideas, only had faith in commerce. The old rulers employed the labour of their tenants and the talent of their artists and artisans to build temples, palaces and cathedrals. The bourgeoisie exploited the labour of their workers to only generate capital. Anything ephemeral, transcendental and non-tangible, which failed to promote production, was brushed aside. Every object or activity had to have a function, and the only honourable function anyone or anything could have, was to make profit.

We all know that people who are out to make money are also adept at finding the means to make it. The speculators and entrepreneurs finding artists starving on the street, soon conjectured how money could be made at their expense. That led to the new

trade of buying and selling art. The art dealers knew their clients were astute businessmen and that art could not be sold to them as art. Before art could be sold in the market place it had to be converted into a commodity. That is when the art dealers enlisted the support of critics, whose job was to make art a worthy and profitable investment.

Rockefeller senior is on record for having advocated to his fellow businessmen to collect art because it helped to build the image of business corporations and improved sale of their products. Wealthy men often delegated the menial task of buying art to the dealers. The artists have always resented the dealer because the latter exploit the former and their work. But the artists have no choice but to accept their hegemony.

The Pakistani artist has no patrons and can be said to be free. But freedom has its own problems. To begin with, freedom needs to be exercised. The establishment is hostile but weak. It doesn't either have a strategy or strength to absorb any form of political opposition or even social contrariness. Writers and painters have been hounded for expressing independent views in the past. My own works were on several occasions in the past censored because of the images and ideas they expressed. Perhaps that was the best manner of acknowledging their worth.

It is strange that unlike capitalist corporations our state is not interested in improving its own image

through art. But the task before the artist in the modern world is not how to find a patron, but how to win his freedom, which can only be won by believing, pursuing and forging ideals of an aesthetics that rests on human realities of the time.

(29 July, 2003)

The Absurd and Absurdity

When in love in youth everyone can write a poem. I never wrote one, not that I never fell in love - there were innumerable occasions - but because the moment passed. It lasted an evening, spanned a week a month perhaps but never more than that. If a lad is not a *dil phaink* (heart flinger) what is the point of being young. The ability to bowl a tight line and length comes later. Racehorses are not easily reined. They would not win races if they were. Constancy in love at that time of life is like a *tattoo* harnessed to a *tonga*.

The *tonga* horses are tame and gentle. They intermittently expel odious wind as they idly trot on to where ever led. The green odour is a source of startling consternation as it invades the commuters on front seat but no harm is intended. Sniffing the backside of a rickshaw as described in one of late Taufiq Rafat's poem can be a positive hazard to health. Writing poetry after striding across adolescence is another matter. Experts inform me that when *tonga* plied the roads horse-wind served as fertiliser for the roadside trees; see for yourself how big and tall the

peepal trees are on the Mall. Now the diesel fumes are killing them.

When a flower bud opens its eye and spreads its petals to stare at the world it is impelled by a natural impulse but to tolerably translate it into feelings and ideas a person needs vision. It requires a vision enriched by trials and perception to seize a moment and solder disparate images to enhance meaning, and reflect on a flower even after it has withered away.

Painting can be a profession or a matter of technical facility, but for some it is a passion. In order to paint an artist must have something to commit. All poets, writers and painters, with a degree of substance, rest their expressions on pediment of their aesthetic and social experience. It goes without saying that artists who wish to communicate their concerns often do possess the means to have their purpose known. There are artists who don't care to share their life. They have the right to their '*chadar* and *chardiwari*'. No one should pry into their privacy if they are tickled by an inner life or criticise them if they fancy wrapping their expressions in obscurity. It is claimed that their art is for themselves and not for others. I wonder why they disclose their works in exhibitions and expose them to avoidable public glare?

I am suspicious of absolute truths claimed by ideologues, but prising ambiguity lacking transparency also cannot be endorsed. Obscurity in art, it seems, is being cultivated to enable artists to

evade moral and social issues. What is merely ambiguous and obscure and amorphous is claimed to be transcendently complex. The concrete and intelligible is shooed off like a rabid dog. It is not considered kosher for the viewer to freely understand art. An intermediary is required to illuminate him on art. The intermediary often succeeds in baffling the viewer further. Most gallery artists today manufacture products that the critic transforms into works of art; their role is pivotal in transforming a commodity into art? Who is the artist? Of course, the critic!

There is another, related, matter that can perhaps be settled by asking another question. If an artwork is resurrected by language, should it be called art or literature? It is ironic that art that rejected description and narration - because they were the spheres of literature; should itself become a slave to words and depend on them to explain itself, its meaning and content. In the process, the world has not become richer but art has lost the resolve and purpose to perceive man and nature; reflect and express the profound ideas and events of its time. Some artists today remind me of the orator in *The Chairs*, a one-act play by the French playwright Eugene Ionesco, first performed in Paris in 1952. In the play an elderly couple sets up chairs and greets invisible guests who have come to hear the old man's message to the world. Subsequently the couple commit suicide and leave the message in the hands of the Orator. The audience anxiously awaits the Message, but at the end of the

play when the Orator rises to deliver the Message, they discover that he is a deaf mute.

In the catalogue of the original production, Ionesco had this reminder: "As the world is incomprehensible to me, I am waiting for someone to explain it." The Chairs highlights loneliness and futility of human existence that was acutely felt in the European metropolis after the Great Wars. Ionesco was lauded for his unique stagecraft and his profound sense of humour. In contrast a large section of contemporary painters can demonstrate unusual skill in employing new materials and mediums. They are innovative and have ability to tease, stimulate and engage the viewers but cannot penetrate their skin. Ionesco presents the messenger as deaf and mute and thereby makes a profound statement about the predicament of modern European man. In the case of a contemporary painter, it is perturbing to realise that the he is becoming mute and deaf himself. Ionesco's Orator is deaf and mute but Ionesco is not deaf and dumb himself. The Chairs is a seminal example of a genre that evolved into what is referred to as the theatre of the absurd. But even while highlighting the futility of human existence; it never yields to unintelligibility and absurdity.

(21 July, 2004)

Tangan bhan dian gay

Tales and incidents that have acquired the status of folklore are full of wisdom. A keen mind can learn far more from a simple homily than tracts of formal knowledge baptised by the academics. In old times, men of wisdom and learning often became part of folklore. They possessed the means to address the most learned as well the illiterate. It is strange and tragic how men of learning confined to universities and academic circles have lost the means to communicate with the average citizen.

Things were different in Homer's times. They were also relatively different in Bulleh Shah's time. Even today farmers and peasants frequently quote Waris Shah to illustrate a truth.

On the other hand, most modern poetry needs an academic to explain it. This is bound to happen when a poet or an artist estranges himself from fellow humans; distances himself from the idiom and concerns of people. Art that derides 'narration' or 'descriptive' art has ironically become increasingly dependent on words to describe and explain it.

Before the argument gets bogged down in rhetoric, I am reminded of a tale that may provide an insight into our surrounding reality; reality that rarely casts its dirty shadow on inner precincts of our creative consciousness or pink and green critical discourse about art or literature.

If the elections have been rigged, so what? If the local bodies elections were politicised by the government and the state, so what? Talking of the elections, as an aside, bring to mind the quiet good-natured fellow who was once the minister of local bodies. His wife, who possessed a great gift of the gab, remarked to friends while she saw her husband gleefully impressing a pretty American lady, "My husband as you can see is the minister of Local Bodies but actually shows a keener interest in the Foreign Bodies."

Let us face it; foreign affairs are far more rewarding than local affairs. All the money in the form of Aid – that you and I have to pay back – comes from abroad. What you get from local affairs is nothing but constant trouble – the demand for democracy, law and order and other such trivialities.

If there are no jobs, no schools and hospitals, what can the state do about it? At least it does, how so ever selectively, get some good persons away with rape, murder and 'honour-killings'. No one can deny that honour is an honourable issue.

Let's get back to our tale that I trust may have an oblique bearing on our present rambling. There was a

village common that had not been used for years. A Wednesday afternoon, which is traditionally considered an auspicious day, the *Kummies* (landless peasants and poor craftsmen) decided to plough part of the land and plant melons – the rest was left for grazing the few heads of cattle they possessed.

Melons sold well in the market in the dry season especially during Ramadan, the month of fasting. In addition, there would be melons for every household. Bread with melons is considered the next best thing to mangoes; since mangoes ripen later, melons have at least a month's head start.

Everyone agreed to the plan and joined hands to till, seed and weed. The land had been fallowing for many moons, enriched with the dung of the few gaunt cattle that had pastured on it. Soon, the vines crept across towards the other furrows, meeting midway on the flat troughs separating them. Within weeks the land was burgeoning with melon leaves.

There was joy when the poor peasants saw a constellation of buds – one by one they opened their hearts to the dusty sky. There was no doubt that it was going to be a great harvest. If they ripened in time, one trolley load of melons could fetch as much as Rs 30,000. There are normally three pickings of melons. No one among them could count the number of trollies that could be transported to the *mandi* (market)

The landowners of the village were angry and envious of the *shamlat* melon fields. How dare the *kummies* farm common land? The *Jats* fretted. One

Friday evening the land owners were invited by their senior cousin to celebrate his son's betrothal with a *mujra*.

Two dancing girls with musicians had been transported from the town on rented air-conditioned vehicles after much persuasion and advance payment.

Taking advantage of the opportunity, an elderly wise *Jat*, stood up and pronounced, "I know what has been troubling you lately. How dare the *kummies* try to be like us! If you stand by me *te assee tangan bhan dian gay*" (We will break their legs) if anyone even dares to step near the melon fields.

The poor *kummies* greatly outnumbered the *Jats* but their poverty had made them meek and submissive. They had heard loud and clear what the terrible looking wiry *Jat*, with dyed black hair and moustaches that he incessantly groomed when he was in a foul temper, intended to do to their limbs. They were all terrified of him.

Only the other day for a trivial misdemeanour, he forced a poor peasant to the ground, face down, and then made him pull up his *dhoti* (loin cloth), revealing an emaciated dark brown bottom that blushed purple when it was repeatedly struck with his own leather shoe dipped in water, by the terrible landlord's servant.

Naturally they were frightened to death of him and dared not go near the fields where hundreds of ripening melons idly sat waiting for them to be picked.

One day one of their determined companions quietly gave them courage by informing that they had

nothing to fear. He had proceeded to town and with the help of a God-fearing and people-friendly lawyer had managed to get a court order in their favour. Their fears were not allayed but the news was so good that they agreed to follow him to the fields to test the melons. Cautiously and steadily, they followed their leader who disdainfully marched ahead.

They were within reach of the melon field when they heard a commanding voice, "Where do you think you are going?" The terrible Chaudhry stood there with a dozen of his goons, armed with steal-headed *lathees* (sticks).

Before anyone could respond, they found themselves being attacked by the hooligans. The poor peasants instantly stopped, tucked up their loincloths and took off as fast as they could in various directions. Their leader, to everyone's utter surprise ran fastest of them all.

Soon someone caught up with him and shouted, "Sir why you running away, you have the stay order?" The man replied in an agitated tone, "What can I do if the landlords cannot read?"

Most of the *Kummies* spent the next few days nursing their bruised backs pondering how to ensure that in the future *Jats* can read. It was not an idle concern for them. If the Chaudhrys will not learn to read, how will the law be enforced? If law cannot be enforced, then in the meantime the *Kummies* who are in larger number need to convey to the goons that if any one of them tries to intimidate them "*assee tangen bhan dian gay*." (31 August, 2005)

Cows and Buckets

"Those who may have missed the point should know that the satisfaction lies first in the revelation that the doctor was not gang-raped but just raped, and secondly that she was not raped 12 times but merely twice. Should that not be a matter of great relief?"

This winter it rained buckets every other day. It rained last night; the sky cleared in the morning and is overcast again. The prospect would cheer anyone who bears scorching heat for most of the year. It is past one, Maulvi Sahib is calling for Zohr prayers. The Zohr *azan* in winters is like a knell announcing the end of the better part of day. After lunch the steeds harnessed to the sun-chariot begin to gallop towards the western horizon.

By the time we pour second cup of afternoon tea, it is dusk and lights need to be switched on. In summer the Zohr *azan* is a beacon for an afternoon nap. When there were no air-conditioners, blinds were pulled down and ventilators covered with black covers to keep the heat out. In those days there used to be few stragglers on the roads after lunch. Since the vast majority of citizens lacked the luxury of electric fans, they retired for a snooze in the shade of a dense foliated tree.

There are of course a variety of shades. There are trees blessed with a cool shade, some that cast a shade of a lighter hue and many that flaunt chequered patterns of light and shade, constantly changing with the movement of sun. Most trees have delicate and feathery leaves that they can barely restrain sunlight from penetrating to the ground.

A political professor once recounted how on one hot summer afternoon while he was proceeding along a dusty road on one of his political jaunts in an arid part of southern Punjab; he encountered a townsman comfortably napping under a *kikar* tree. There was nothing in sight for miles except for gusts of scorching afternoon breeze (*loo*) and the blinding sun. The professor was greatly intrigued to see a human prostrate under a *kikar* (acacia) with such ease.

Without bothering to introduce himself he inquired "*Janab!* What are you doing out there?" Abid Ameerq (a well-known Seraiki poet and intellectual), melancholically surveyed the Professor with dilated eyes wondered who was this short creature with thick lenses and light rusty hair, sauntering about in the afternoon heat. He took some time to collect his thoughts and then meekly confessed, "*Saeen*, I was proceeding to the far village down this road but on seeing this cover I lay down for a brief rest and then seemingly dozed off." The Prof. stared in disbelief how the dusty shade, pregnant with unbearable heat could ever be categorised as 'cover'.

This reminds me of two Englishmen who were on an assignment, collecting intelligence and taming

the native tribes in remote and desolate districts. One of them was stationed around Jacobabad, near borders of Sind and Baluchistan, wrote back in a letter. "It is above 120 centigrade in the shade; but no shade."

The other one who was an assistant collector at Bhakkar in Western Punjab informed the Scotsman who arrived on the day a dust storm was raging in the district, "Not to worry! We have dust storm only once a year" adding, "but linger on for the whole year." I wonder what the Roman would say about the English weather to a fellow Roman, "Marcus Spencus! Somewhat misty again today?" I love English weather in Pakistan. Mists flirting with wild chestnuts and fir trees can be enchanting. Even in the plans when it slowly builds up to screen prospects it can evoke pensive feelings, romance out of reach. As I said, it is an overcast day but instead of feeling cheered, darkness infests my heart; a darkness that would not be lifted even if the sun was blazing into my face.

By now the Zohr prayers must be over. How many devotees prayed for forgiveness for remaining silent over the rape cases of Mukhtar Mai and Dr. Shazia Khalid? Should we take satisfaction from the inquiry tribunal report handout issued by the Balochistan government on March 8, 2005? The report stated, that contrary to the charges levelled earlier, Dr. Shazia was not gang-raped. Yes, she was raped but not gang raped; raped twice but not by two but only by one – unidentified person, while the other unidentified person didn't rape, just stood guard

outside the room to ensure the victim was raped in peace.

Those who may have missed the point should know that the satisfaction lies first in the revelation that the doctor was not gang-raped but just raped and secondly that she was not raped 12 times but merely twice. Should that not be a matter of great relief?

It should also be a relief for everyone that Mukhtar Mai was not raped. Since five of the six scoundrels who had been sentenced to death for allegedly raping Lady Mukhtar Mai have been released, it can be assumed that they did not commit rape. The sixth of the gang has had his death sentence commuted to life imprisonment. I guess because he was kind to the victim while he raped. The picture doesn't look as bad as it was initially painted to be?

According to the latest reports, the score is that Mukhtar Mai may have been only partially raped and Dr. Sahiba was only twice put to inconvenience. We must not, of course, forget to mention the unidentified person for acting so nobly by standing guard outside the room to ensure no one else inconvenienced the Dr. Sahiba. If the matter is pursued and investigated with the same concern, all facts that have escaped notice should be in place soon. Once this is done, both ladies can be exonerated for having been raped and sent back to lead their normal happy lives as objects "like a cow or a bucket".

On this cool cloudy day, I am for once, not cheered. To use a poet's words, my heart aches, a

strange numbness overtakes, as though of cowardice I
have drunk.

(16 March, 2005)

Gilded Art and Gilded Capitalism

"I must confess that the economic forces set into motion by capitalism are quite awesome. Many people of my generation fought to the best of their abilities for democracy and human rights. Is it not ironic that today the forces of imperialism should have usurped that agenda from us?"

Aldous Huxley believed that no activity, research and speculation, is possible without a preliminary hypothesis about the nature and the purpose of things. Human mind cannot deal with the Universe directly, and can only work on a simplified symbolic plan, abstracted by the mind out of the complex and multifarious reality of man's immediate intuition. A premises or a hypothesis may be wrong but 'Man approaches the unattainable truth through a succession of errors.' Having 'invented' a hypothesis, he proceeds to act upon it. Experience shows him where he erred, which leads him to an indefinite process of questioning and modifying the hypothesis. Huxley believed, 'thought must be divided against itself before it can come to any knowledge of itself.' He also points out, 'religious hypotheses, being less susceptible of experimental verification than the

hypotheses of science, have undergone less modification.' (*Wordsworth in the Tropics*, Purple Patch, *Daily Times*.)

What does this mean? Applied to contemporary situation it means, simply, that today believers and some liberals are really birds of the same feather. For most believers, religion is an act of faith, which needs neither verification nor modification. Most liberals would have no truck with someone who upholds a hypothesis or an ideology for explaining or understanding the world and human conduct. None will submit to reason and the right of others to uphold a belief or hypothesis that is at variance with their own. It is ironic that Liberals should themselves rigidly uphold their ideology while denying others the same luxury.

Albert Einstein writes, 'I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.' I believe Einstein must always have begun with a hypothesis and then proceeded to investigate its veracity. Having a premise is different from blindly believing in something. In the first case a person proceeds with doubt, in the latter he begins with an act of faith.

In today's world, an idea or premise that fails to laud the benefits of globalisation and market economy is considered obscurantist. People, who happily give away their self for a cause, are declared terrorists. Regardless of the predatory intrusion of foreign

capital across sovereign national boundaries, it is supposed in the end to take care of everything. When the flood abates, regardless of how many continents have been drowned, the water will establish an equal level. It is in this hope that humanity must find its solace. Speculations about the world and fate of man are futile. Attempts to abstract from 'immediate intuition' or experience, the means to redress appalling disparities, should be regarded positively subversive. And all those who fight to defend their sovereignty, their homes and their way of life can only be terrorists, who should be put down on sight for the general good. Join us or get killed, is the slogan of the day. Might have always been right, but never before was it so abundantly declared right.

I must confess that the economic forces set into motion by capitalism are quite awesome. Many people of my generation fought to the best of their abilities for democracy and human rights. Is it not ironic that today the forces of imperialism should have usurped that agenda from us? It is evident that, today, human rights in their hands should become a tool of aggression. It provides the imperialist powers a ready excuse to invade and interfere in the conduct of weaker countries to promote their own political and economic interests, on the plea of establishing democracy or correcting human rights misdemeanours.

In the field of art, when in the sixties the new generation tried to create an alternative culture, it was

not opposed but effortlessly absorbed by the economic forces of capitalism. Even the clothware at London's Carnegie Street, considered quite weird in the beginning, soon became a symbol of the avant-garde. They were selling at higher prices than clothes in some of the pricey stores on Bond Street.

Similarly, Pop Art was considered an errant art movement at its inception. It was in fact anti-art, which dismissed and mocked abstract art for being esoterically speculative and irrelevant. Pop artist deliberately supported the lowbrow popular images because they were common and considered vulgar by the highbrow modern artists. Their inspiration came from road signs, labels, advertisements, hoardings and objects associated with mass consumption. It was a revolt against non-representational painting and its highbrow aesthetic pretensions. It was not long before the galleries, instead of declaring it trash, baptized it instead. By the sixties, it was accepted as a new vital art form and praised for its vernacular character.

Since the sixties there have been successive efforts to challenge established institutions and aesthetic standards and ideas. Some of these have been in opposition to the authority of museums and the exploitative character of the galleries. Others have been directed not merely against the crass commercial forces of capitalism, but were hostile to the anti-humanist nature of capitalism itself. Let us not forget that many of the prominent modern painters had strong leftwing leanings. They were, however, not

sidelined or silenced but absorbed by the 'System'. But artists continued their struggle. The Conceptualist artist who felt that the dealers exploited their work and the museums buried it alive, 'stroved to banish the pictorial and visual aspects of art' because they were of the view that art, which has a permanent tangible existence, can be easily converted into a commodity and exchanged for cash.

To save art from becoming a commercial commodity, they asserted that an idea was more significant than the work itself. They strove to create a conceptual response rather than bringing into being an aesthetic object in the form of a painting or a piece of sculpture. Happenings and Environmental art are also closely related to Conceptual art. Events and environmental constructions are, by their nature, transitory and can only exist through memory and the experience of a spectator in his mind. In the words of a critic, 'The work is what is left after the object has been removed.' The Conceptual works, which were amorphous, intangible and transitory, also failed to escape the clutches of the market forces. The art dealers soon found the means to seize these transitory moments and make capital out of them. An artist crucifies himself on his Volkswagen as a form of social protest. The iron nails with which the artist had been crucified were retrieved by a dealer and put up for sale, in a box lined with velvet, at a New York Gallery and sold at an exorbitant price.

I wonder what happened to work of the artist who became a 'martyr to his notions'. Apparently, he died by slicing his manhood, inch-by-inch. I will tell you what happened. The photographs of the event had been taken, which were later sold to the art collectors. The western artist finds himself at the total mercy of the Establishment. It seems so powerful that it has an overwhelming capacity to absorb any form of expression, which is directed against it. Even many of the protest movements have been easily absorbed and presented to the world as examples of political and social tolerance and respect for freedom of choice and expression. The Goliath tolerates these radical movements and individual activism because they are strategically useful in imparting to it a human image.

If public dicing of a penis can be declared kosher and translated as art, there is no cause to be terribly upset by an act of self-defence and term it terrorism. Speaking for myself, I would certainly find residual effect of a person publicly castrating himself far more terrifying than the sight of someone who was trying to defend his balls. Does that make me into a terrorist?

(14 July 2003)

A Kankar a Day **Keeps the Devil Away**

Newspapers print a man's photograph on the front page. He is charged with having sold his soul. The same evening, he is greeted at a wedding with great respect and ceremony. Others exchange glances of grimacing disapproval but remain silent because they don't matter. But they do: that is the whole point

There was a man a long time ago speeding along in the countryside when he saw a person stranded on the deserted road. The person was plainly but cleanly dressed in a faded ruffled shirt and crumpled shalwar. The way he meekly asked for a lift, seemed to be in distress. He stood in the dusty shadow of a gnarled acacia. It was a stuffy hot summer day. The man must be tired and thirsty, the driver thought. God knows for how long the poor fellow has been stranded? He thought again.

The natural reaction of any decent man driving a car in those days would have been to stop. That is what he did. He pressed his foot rather hard on the break and managed to stop his old faithful Morris Minor, with loud whispers of protests from her, a short distance ahead from where the man was standing. He

persuaded the care to reverse and without small talk simply said, "Get in". The man slipped into the vehicle and closed the door rather lightly after him.

They proceeded in silence for some time but on approaching a habitation of wild bushes, where the road sharply curved to the left, the man in khaki commanded that the car be stopped. The good fellow driving the car was taken aback by rude tone of the voice but on seeing that a pistol was being pressed into his ribs instantly obliged. "Get out of the car and go and stand five paces away with your arms on your head". The frightened fellow did precisely what he was told. "Now take off your watch and out with all the money you have!"

Just when the man in faded khaki shirt was about to drive off in his car leaving him stranded on the road, our good man pleaded, "You are welcome to my money and the car but please don't tell anyone what you have just done, for if you do people may stop helping others."

It is our misfortune that the scoundrel went back bragging about his feat among his fellow scoundrels. As a result good people were condemned to trust no one regardless of the colour of the shirt, tie or his pressed suit. Most honest citizens were agitated and morally confused with knowledge of the tale till they were reminded by a wise man, who reminded, "Look here good people! You don't give up a good principle because of a bad experience."

A society resolved to forge ahead must build a pantheon of its own role models. It must celebrate its

heroes who have achieved excellence or toiled for others. It must laud the common men and women who have glazed their cheeks caring and feeling for others. Surely this is hard for people whose tears have dried up with burning heat of personal suffering. Ironically those who have suffered the most and gained the least are the ones more easily inclined to spare tears for fellow humans.

Aitzaz Ahsan's open letter addressed to Malik Mohammad Qayyum, the Supreme Court Bar Association president is not merely a critique of the conduct of one of the most successful lawyers of our time but also a passionate attempt to encourage people to call a spade a spade and "to judge people by the means that they adopt rather than only by the success they attain". We must not be dazzled by what a person has achieved in life but must objectively examine the means whereby the success has come his way. He maintains that since people have lived for decades in "awe" of what he calls the 'success ethics' they, "choose to overlook and entirely condone the means ... adopted to attain ... success, status or wealth".

I don't wish to add a brushstroke of my own to Aitzaz's portrait of Sharifuddin Pirzada. Can there be forgiveness for the man who pleads, "Accept me as I am, warts, blemishes, briefcases and all"? He appears to be pleading, "I raped her because she was weak and corrupt". Let's leave the judgement to Malik Mohammad Qayyum, a senior advocate, a former judge and presently president of the Supreme Court Bar Association. My personal view is that to put Mr.

Pirzada on the Committee for Constitutional and Legal Reforms, according to a common homily, is like designating a goat to protect for the night a pile of harvested grain.

We should be grateful to Mr. Pirzada perhaps for being a most splendid negative example by which we can teach our young what they should not do. We have reached a stage where being virtuous has become synonymous with being weak and brigands are called brave. People proudly display dentures studded with stolen diamonds while the honest are sheepish about their frayed collars. There are thieves all over the world but in civilised societies they are spurned.

In Pakistan things have been different. Newspapers print a man's photograph on the front page. He is charged with having sold his soul. The same evening, he is greeted at a wedding with great respect and ceremony. How many people dare act with such courage, to their enormous gain, some guests at the wedding enviously ponder? Others exchange glances of grimacing disapproval but remain silent because they don't matter. But they do: that is the whole point.

Let us resolve to throw a *kankar* a day to keep devils away, not forgetting meanwhile to lay flowers at the feet of our positive role models - individuals who have instilled hope and inspired us to virtue, better conduct and a vision of a better and more humane world.

(28 December, 2005)

'We can't Blink it More'

'The law of the jungle operates in the world'; someone observed in despair. 'That is sometime true,' I agreed, but adding that humans possess a consciousness and no longer live in a jungle. Humans have a memory and can conceptualise a future. They have established civilisations. Their accomplishments are beyond animal endeavour. Fortunately, man may have evolved from the ape, but can never physically revert back. Man can ironically now only regress to something worse. Once in a while there are individuals who have an irresistible urge to ape their ancestors and go beyond to their hoofed master. They must be restrained. This is what all of us must do to protect the ideas and visions of the world, which humans have nurtured and cherished in all these thousands of years.

Intizar Hussain in his short story expresses these concerns in a dramatic perspective. *Akhri Admi* (The Last Man) symbolically presents man's inner turmoil by describing the predicament of humans living on an island. Overcome with evil temptations they gradually begin to transform into monkeys. At least no one is left

but one, *Akhri Admi*. Man is after all a man, and has his moments of strength and weakness. Whenever this last human surrenders to a temptation he finds his limbs begin to instantly transform into those of a monkey. He takes courage and fights back the temptation and as a consequence reverts to his normal self again. This happens to him over and over again, but he does not give in and finally vows that whatever may happen he will never let himself become a monkey. This is where we leave him and the story ends. It is a rather stern and telling method to inform the reader that he needs to be strong and vigilant. In order to remain human man cannot barter or surrender 'self'. I visited the United States for the first time in 1987, or perhaps a year or two later. On landing in New York at the La Guardia air terminal, I instantly fell in love with America. There were people of all colours, different racial ethnic and religious backgrounds, intermingling without prejudice. It took only a moment's hesitation for me to realise and accept that I was not being treated an alien. I have ever since visited the US on other occasions for different durations. During my visits, I was able to paint the American landscape from Vermont and Maine in the north, through New York, New Jersey, Washington DC, Tennessee, and Kentucky to Florida in the south. I painted the wild summer prospects, autumn in its arboreal radiance and virgin passages of snow, summarising aspects of nature asleep in the dead of winter, to its barest brevity. I have probably painted greater diversity of the American landscape than most

American painters have had opportunity to address. Should that not alone make me an American? I love nature, but I like people more and never lose an opportunity to interact with them. I am eager to share my thoughts and know what the concerns of others are. In the States, I have met great many sorts of peoples. I found most of them very kind and helpful. They would go out of the way to help.

The last time I was in The States I was placed between Miami and Fort Lauderdale in Florida. I was not up yet that morning when we were woken by a telephone call informing that one of the towers of the World Trade Centre was burning. My wife and I dashed downstairs and after impatiently fumbling with the remote control, we managed to put on the television. One of the towers was bellowing clouds of black smoke. Within minutes an aeroplane entered the TV screen from the left and in a blink disappeared in the second Tower. Now there were two great glass edifices bellowing smoke. Everyone was stunned. Even the American reporters, who can endlessly churn out words faster than water can pour out of a full tap, were silenced. What had happened was totally unexpected and unprecedented. No one knew what to expect next. Awareness slowly returned and the reporters returned to their business, conjecturing the extent of damage, which could have been caused to the towers and trying to allay fears assuring the viewers that the fire fighters were fighting to put out the fire. It was just when the language was reaching a crescendo of speculative inanity, first one and then the

second Tower collapsed on its own foundations. Hell was let loose. One event led to the other and in a matter of days USA did not remain the same, as one knew it.

This reminds me of Arthur Miller who referring to the era of McCarthyism, writes, 'It was as though the whole country had been born anew, without a memory even of certain elemental decencies, which a year or two earlier, no one would have imagined could be altered, let alone forgotten. Astounded, I watched men pass me by without a nod that I had known rather well for years... Terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered, and yet all they knew was terror. That so interior and subjective an emotion could have been so manifestly created from within was a marvel to me.' (Introduction to Collected Plays)

Today it is even more apparent how the people of the United States have been frightened out of their wits. People who have gallantly fought to win freedom, and their civil and human rights have been easily persuaded to surrender their essential rights to the State and Government. At the time Arthur Miller was writing *The Crucible*, he was appalled at what was happening to the 'Land of the Free.' Salem witch-hunt for many years remained, E.R. Wood informs in the Preface to the Play, an inexplicable darkness to Miller, until he saw in a modern parallel the essence of its source and its evil powers. This was the time when Senator McCarthy was ruthlessly determined to hunt

second Tower collapsed on its own foundations. Hell was let loose. One event led to the other and in a matter of days USA did not remain the same, as one knew it.

This reminds me of Arthur Miller who referring to the era of McCarthyism, writes, 'It was as though the whole country had been born anew, without a memory even of certain elemental decencies, which a year or two earlier, no one would have imagined could be altered, let alone forgotten. Astounded, I watched men pass me by without a nod that I had known rather well for years... Terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered, and yet all they knew was terror. That so interior and subjective an emotion could have been so manifestly created from within was a marvel to me.' (Introduction to Collected Plays)

Today it is even more apparent how the people of the United States have been frightened out of their wits. People who have gallantly fought to win freedom, and their civil and human rights have been easily persuaded to surrender their essential rights to the State and Government. At the time Arthur Miller was writing *The Crucible*, he was appalled at what was happening to the 'Land of the Free.' Salem witch-hunt for many years remained, E.R. Wood informs in the Preface to the Play, an inexplicable darkness to Miller, until he saw in a modern parallel the essence of its source and its evil powers. This was the time when Senator McCarthy was ruthlessly determined to hunt

individuals as communists and as the Salem judges had been to hunt out witches. Even mildly liberal views were considered sufficient evidence of a person being a communist. It is quite frightening how a well-planned campaign of an extreme conservative political force can create not only terror, but also a new subjective reality, which can transform itself into a Crusade or a Holy War.

President Bush's threat, 'Either you are with us or against us', reminds one of what Danforth, the Deputy Governor, says to Francis Nurse: 'But you must understand sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there is no road between.' (Act 3, *The Crucible*). Seeing in his own time the evil of hunting political adversaries, Arthur Miller writes, 'the sin of public terror is that it divests a man of conscience, of him.' Above all, he writes, 'I accepted the notion that conscience was no longer a private matter, but one of state administration.'

Bush administration, which was first conducting a vicious witch-hunt in the name of terrorism, is now conducting a war against a sovereign state on the plea of eliminating weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, it has been demanding of its own people and weak countries to 'hand over their conscience'. Anyone who will not submit is being threatened and targeted. Fortunately, there is a worldwide reaction against US government's unilateral invasion of Iraq. The reaction cuts across political, ideological, and geographical as well as religious differences. The US

citizens and others world over have refused to hand over their conscience and 'self' to President Bush because he is writing his laws with 'common vengeance'. He is what he always was, but 'naked now'. 'We can't blink it more'. (The Crucible)

(2003)

Much Wind and Music

Some art critics are of the view that if, to use a neutral word, the donor elephant was invited to defecate in person at the Tate, the audience could have experienced both the form and size of the artwork as well as the music, which went unrecorded.

The National Art Exhibition was inaugurated in May 2003. The Director General of the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) informed the audience in his speech that the Exhibition was being held after seven years. The last one was held in 1996. Not bad? The audience was also told that it was the 8th National Exhibition since the PNCA was established in 1971.

The DG had the temerity or if you may courage to confess that he felt 'ashamed', that after so many years we still did not have a National Art Gallery. This is the first time in the annals of our history that a government official has behaved like a public servant and publicly accepted responsibility. I hope the DG, who is a poet as well as a painter, is not fired for stepping out of line from the approved conduct,

according to which an officer is expected to conceal and not reveal failures.

It is regrettable that we love to portray our self, arms akimbo, nose in the air, an ugly image of ourselves. It so unseemly that our Establishment should have a dire aversion to being recognised for our art and literature, our crafts and decorative skills, our accomplishments in the field of music and architecture and other talents where our people express and demonstrate their humanity and aesthetic sense of beauty. Instead ,we are content to swagger about our being an ideological state. We are even indifferent to how the Muslim World views us. We have a closed mind, like a tunnel that appears to have no light on the other end. In half the century we have learnt little or nothing from our own experience let alone of others. I think it was King Farouq of Egypt, who while referring to Pakistan a few years after its inception, quipped that it was a country, which had recently discovered Islam.

The military dictators on the pretext that citizens cannot rule themselves have disenfranchised the nation, causing havoc to its legal, cultural and democratic institutions. People have individually achieved much more than the Dictators have claimed in their rule after usurping and militarising the state. In order to further their private agendas, they have callously subjected our children to illiteracy, our sons to unemployment and our elders to disease and death. The Martial State claims we are a martial nation, so we

must have more torpedoes and tanks, more short-range and long-range missiles than we need food or housing colonies. There is no doubt that our people are brave, who have in the past resisted both dictators and aggressors. But then people of all countries are brave when it comes to defending themselves and what is precious, dear to them.

But all and above being brave and proud people are we not also a nation of Iqbal, Faiz and Jalib, a nation of Fareed, Shah Hussain, Khushal Khan and Lateef Bhittai. A nation of Roshan Ara Begum, Shareef Khan, Nusrat Fateh and Noor Jehan; a nation of the Dancing Girl of Mohenjodaro and of the Starving Buddha; a nation of Chughtai, Allah Buksh and Shakir Ali. Above all it is a nation of you and me, because we alone today define who we are and must be. We must forbid them to dress us in robes of their own liking.

It is one of the great ironies of human history that while man has technologically advanced to a stage where he stands on the 'shores of cosmic ocean' to sail to the heavens, he is spiritually or aesthetically speaking, primitively equipped to handle himself. That is why he intermittently regresses to barbarisms. He likes to hunt even today. Not for food but just for sport. He takes pride in hunting animals in the wild. Gets even greater pleasure in killing fellow humans, for he resorts to it incessantly.

If man continues to love riding tanks and remains culturally static, I can't see how he can visualise a better world and future for himself. As

things stand today, he is condemned to destroy himself. There is evidence of it already. The idiom of language and meaning of words, for instance, has undergone a momentous change in recent years. Language which was a tool for exploring truth, new emotions and ideas to enrich human knowledge, is now employed as a gadget to conceal lies and present horrors in favourable setting.

Language has really stormed ahead of Aldous Huxley's essay 'Words and Behaviour', included in the Book of English Prose, prescribed for undergraduate studies at GC Lahore in the late fifties. The essay illustrates how words and phrases are coined to conceal actual facts. In our times the phrase 'collateral damage' has become quite common for describing death and destruction of children and their families, of sisters, ageing men and women, their homes and neighbourhood and much, much more.

In International Law the term Non-military Targets means what it exactly states. It means- if it needs explaining- that following should not be targeted, (a) schools: may be full of young students, (b) hospitals: usually choked with patients, (c) industrial enterprises: because of poor workers supporting large families, (d) cities with commuters, pedestrians and shops, power and water facilities and other assets necessary to sustain civil society. In actual practice, Non-military targets are often the first to be struck to create 'Terror and Awe'. It is not coincidental that even art and the language of art criticism are

becoming intentionally more and more obscure and sneaky. Elephant dung is prized as art, by the Tate gallery, whereas the Mona Lisa was a few decades earlier disdainfully dismissed by Salvador Dali, the famous surrealist painter, when he planted a pair of moustaches on the Mona Lisa. Some chaps think that by denigrating others they can elevate themselves. I could never think of adding anything obscene to Dali's pretty face.

Mocking the past may help to create something new but not necessarily something better. I wonder how many dung cakes can be made out of single elephant excreta. One thing is for sure, there would be enough in number to go around for all who sponsored the work. Next, we will hear that Christy's or Sotheby's are selling Hitler's dehydrated turd. That would certainly be followed by a claim that it was a forgery and that the auction didn't smell right. Apparently, it was not the Fuhrer but Goebles who sat for it.

The politically concerned would also wonder whether it was one of the captive elephants from the London Zoo that was pressured to perform the act or was it an act of free will exercised by one of the elephants around Lockness in the English Lake Districts. Some art critics are of the view that had - to use a neutral word - the donor elephant been invited to defecate in person at The Tate, the audience could have experienced various stages or levels, both the formation of form and size of the artwork, as well as the music, which went unrecorded.

Finally, the question remains, who is the artist? Is it the ingenious individual who thought of putting the shit up for display or the elephant who actually did it? Obviously, elephant defecation has a much wider scope as art for art criticism than, the faint smile of the Mona Lisa. To be a person with a universal vision, an artist has to think 'big' and sever the so-called umbilical cord that ties him down and binds him or her with the tiresome process of creativity, birth and life. It seems he would be better off intently focussing on the rectum and work up as much wind and music as he possibly can.

(27 May, 2003)

Not a Proper War

For almost two months I was 'absconding' from Lahore. On my return I have discovered that the monsoons arrived almost a month ago. The grass is climbing up the wall, due partly to the gardener's neglect but propelled mostly by the incessant downpour from the darkened sky. Even the most solemn-looking plants are now a beaming green and without envy.

I love this weather. If roofs cave in on the poor sleeping under them, children drown in the flooded gutters, shanty habitations get washed away in the middle of night or the ceiling of the National Assembly starts leaking it is no fault of the weather. It is because we don't care for or cannot manage our assets. If we are not interested in our people, then they will drown or be rendered homeless even 'on a rainy day'. When the Masters of the National Assembly are bent upon shaking its very foundations, the ceiling will leak.

Early one morning in a somewhat similar weather - an overcast sky and a drizzle- in the neighbourhood of Harrisburg a Black American walked into a 711 store and asked for a large cup of

coffee. But the *desi* proprietor's coffee maker was not ready. The customer, an ex- serviceman, was angered: it was early in the morning and he needed his coffee to drive to work. Desperate for the dark brew, he couldn't help admonishing the owner who made an elaborate excuse for being unable to provide coffee on that particular day. Seeing that his customer was not impressed he asked him to wait a little, promising a very special mug on the house. The coffee, in the largest paper cup available and presented with a beaming smile, evidently pleased the customer. The man was back the next morning and the day after that. He got hooked to my *desi* friend's brew and would often stay for a while exchanging pleasantries. On one such occasion the conversation drifted to cold tea, at which point he asked of my friend, "I am told that there are people who also drink it [Tea] hot?" My friend gasped and stared in astonishment. The average American is so absorbed in himself that he cannot imagine there can be people who drink different brews or entertain a culture and manners different from their own.

On another occasion this splendid fellow declared with a patriotic flaunt that America had never lost a war. When my friend reminded him about Vietnam he retorted, "That was not a proper war. It was a guerrilla war." I have ever since wondered about the definition of a 'proper' war. I am a mere painter but if Leonardo da Vinci could design war machines why can't I ponder over the definition of a 'proper' war?

Should the definition be limited to sword fencing as in medieval times? But we cannot revert to those times for now we have better weapons to kill with. Of course we can keep alive fencing at Olympic Games. The victor wins without causing anybody hurt or shame. As war, this would be unacceptable to the strong: no fun, no blood, no death, no lessons taught and no booty at the end of it. How can a proper war be conducted in such circumstances? If a gangster bullies a citizen not familiar with how guns work, would a gun-duel be a 'proper' fight? Of course not: it would be murder. If the novice, howsoever brave, accepts the challenge, it would be suicide. He would have to work out something more sensible.

Actually, there are no proper wars except those fought with words across the table. War is not a sport. It has no rules. In a world where might is right and morals are shunned for profit, the strong make the rules and change them to their convenience. Wars are a dirty business - profitable for those who treat them as commerce. They must be avoided. Unfortunately finding a reason to pick up a fight is easier than enforce it upon reason to stop one.

We have seen in our own times how the mighty justify murder in the name of democracy, national security and other words, easily coined to further their interests. These facts need no elaboration - those who cannot see them are either blind or collaborators.

Given the weapons most countries now have, starting a war endangers the whole world. There is

wisdom in the saying: *kisee ko apnay say kamzor na samjho* (consider no one weaker than yourself). While we all share the responsibility for avoiding a war it primarily rests with the strong. Unfortunately, the strong never exercise 'propriety' in war and the weak cannot afford it.

Shivaji, the great Maratha nationalist hero, would have been insane to give 'proper' battle to Emperor Aurangzeb. The Mughals could spare thousands of horses and hundreds of elephants to accompany them when they proceeded to their morning toiletries even on the battlefield. The Mughals disdainfully referred to Shivaji as a mountain rat but all students of South Asian history know that this did not stop Shivaji from relentlessly bleeding the mighty Mughals and making Aurangzeb's Deccan campaign an utter disaster. The modern-day Mughals have new descriptions for those who resist them. But have they learnt from history or their own experience? While battles have been won nobody can win a war waged against an entire people. People have a magical way of endlessly resurrecting themselves. For every branch severed from a tree, several sprout in its place.

A good rule is to never let an argument develop into a dispute; a dispute into a military conflict that can transform into a people's war. People's wars sap and exhaust the invaders' energy and resources because these are not proper wars - the enemy is not visible. I recall a soldier who when asked why, with all

the military ware they could not eliminate the Vietcong, replied, "How do we know who is a Vietcong, everyone around here wears a black vest and black pyjamas." Like the Deccan campaign of the Mughals, the Vietnam War of the US was destined to be a terrible loss.

Yet, last week Israel's Gen Ruth Yorou complained in an interview with the CNN that they could not get to the Hezbollah fighters because they were "masquerading as civilians". But if Israel keeps on raining bombs on the Lebanese people and their homes it will only strengthen the bond between Hezbollah and the people of Lebanon. The general also suggested that the conflict was about the "clash of values", that Israel was fighting against a "culture of death". I wish she would not hide behind such vicious and deceitful phrases. Should not she wonder why some people resist aggressors by laying down their lives so that others may live? Herein lays the tragic irony of it all. Davids will not submit to the Goliath.

(17 August, 2006)

Jinnah and the Bag of Jewels

The Bahawalpur state borrowed Rs.70 million from the British to undertake the Sutlej Valley Project that entailed building of the Hussaini Headworks. The project, an ambitious undertaking for a state with moderate revenue, ran into financial difficulties. The Nawab asked the British to re-adjust the loan and extend the repayment period but the British firmly tuned down the request and served a notice on the state insisting that the entire outstanding amount – Rs.20 million - be paid without delay.

The mother of Nawab Sadiq Mohammed IV, who may not have been more than two years of age, feared that if Bahawalpur failed to pay up, the British would use the pretext to take over the state. Considering that as chairman of the Regency Council, Major Sir Manichean, managed the state (he was later replaced by Maulvi Sir Rahim Buksh, another British nominee) the British could not absolve themselves of the moral responsibility. It cannot be imagined that such projects were undertaken without the approval of the Regency Council.

An aside here: Maulvi Sir Rahim Bukhsh taught Persian at Aitchison College, Lahore. One of the reasons he was picked was that the British wanted to introduce Urdu in the state. Makhdoom Shahab ud Din, the former finance minister, informs me that his great grandfather could only converse in Persian but his grandfather could speak both languages. I wonder if the Makhdoom can speak Persian today? Mukhdoom Shahab also informs me that British did not want to take over the entire state - only Rahim Yar Khan. One should never stop counting one's blessings.

On receiving the demand notice the wise mother of the young Nawab, according to Hussain Haroon who has recently recounted the episode to me, called for Maulvi Ghulam Hussain, a distinguished subject and close confidant (the father of our illustrious MNA, Mian Nizam ud Din Haider). Maulvi Sahib rushed to the palace in great haste. He was eagerly awaited and a servant instantly ushered him to the royal presence. Her Highness was visibly agitated but pretended to calmly look out of the window. "My friend, we have a very serious business at hand. There is conspiracy to take over the state and I need your help." She confided without mincing words; quickly explaining the reason he was there and what was expected of him, solemnly admonishing, "Not a word of this to anyone". "My life is at your service, Highness, but what am I to do?" pleaded Maulvi Hussain. Her Highness after a momentary pause directed Maulvi Sahib to come and sit on the chair next to the sofa where she herself sat.

Her highness then proceeded to inform him in a nutshell that she had received a demand notice for Rs.20 million from their friends, the British, and feared that unless the amount was paid the state would be taken over. Maulvi Sahib was alarmed. Ignoring his concern, Her Highness continued, "The only way we can raise the twenty million is by disposing of the crown jewels". "The crown jewels?" exclaimed Maulvi Sahib. "There is no other way", replied Her Highness.

"I ask of you in great confidence to quietly and cautiously, prepare for a journey to Hyderabad Deccan where you will try to mortgage or sell the jewels to the Nizam and raise the direly-needed sum. And don't forget to take the brown leather bag lying on that small table next to the door before you go. Good luck and God be your protector." Maulvi Ghulam Hussain withdrew from the royal presence stunned and with glazed eyes. He returned home pretending he had been entrusted by Her Highness to look through some old documents.

I am not quite sure which route he took but he reached Bombay and then arrived in Hyderabad. Finally, he got to meet His Exalted Highness the Nizam but begged that his identity not be disclosed. In plain words he informed the Nizam that one of his sisters was in distress and sought his help. Without further words he opened the brown bag and presented the contents.

The Nizam instantly recognised the jewels and declared with a smirk, "But these belong to the Bahawalpur state". I am told he even recognised the Mughal jewels, including a pair of earrings belonging to Princess Jehan Ara. He then asked Maulvi Sahib to leave the bag with him and return the next day. Maulvi Sahib, pleased that he had got through to the Nizam, backed off, executing the *farshi salams* he had practised. The Nizam seemed a nice person and surely would find a way to help.

The Nizam realised what the British were up to. The next morning, the Maulvi Sahib was disappointed to hear the Nizam decline help pointing out that if the British had made up their mind, they would find one way or the other to get what they wanted. Distressed at the thought of what he had to report to Her Highness on returning empty-handed, he had nowhere to go but return to Bombay and then Bahawalpur – a journey he wished would never end.

At Bombay, he was distracted by the noise of a railway engine shunting about in the yard. Shortly afterwards he was almost jerked off the berth on which he was lying like a listless log. Getting off the bogey to find out what had collided into the train, he learnt that a saloon had been attached at the back. On further enquiry he discovered that it belonged to Mr. Jinnah, the famous barrister.

Maulvi Ghulam Hussain had always been keen to meet Mr. Jinnah. He was amazed at the unusual circumstances that had provided him the opportunity

to meet him. He took courage to call on him and from what follows, I believe he must have been pleasantly received by Mr. Jinnah. During their conversation, Mr. Jinnah observed that Ghulam Sahib looked worried and asked him what the matter was. Encouraged by the sympathy, Maulvi Sahib narrated the entire tale of woe, in spite of his promise to Her Highness. Mr. Jinnah listened attentively and then said, "Let's think about it".

He promised to get in touch with his visitor. Throughout the train journey Maulvi Sahib waited for the visit but Mr. Jinnah did not contact him. Only when the train was approaching Bahawalpur, to Maulvi Ghulam Hussain's utter surprise and great happiness, Mr. Jinnah climbed into his compartment and pointedly asked, "How long does the British Indian Railway run through the state?" Making a rough calculation, Maulvi Ghulam Hussain answered, "About 300 miles, sir". Mr. Jinnah then did some quick calculations on a small pad and announced, "According to their own rules, British owe one hundred and twenty million to the state of Bahawalpur. What the state should do is write to them to deduct the twenty million owed to the Crown by the State and pay the remaining one hundred million."

The Bahawalpur state received no reply to their letter. For being an anti-state element, Maulvi Sahib was banished by the British from Bahawalpur to Multan for life. He spent the rest of his days at the Bahawalpur House, a residence of the Nawab. It was

only after his death that the body of this great man was brought to Dera Nawab where he is buried. The Nawab's residence has now been converted into Multan Club.

(22 Feb. 2006)

Otherwise, All is Well

One of the newspaper headlines today read, "Protestors go berserk in Peshawar". They burnt down shops, smashed the Peshawar Press Club, pelted Edwards College and targeted public installations including streetlights and traffic signals. While they were at it, I wonder why they stopped short of dispensing with schools, hospitals and such other offensive social utilities.

My eight-year-old grandson Mustafa who goes to school in Cairo because his father is posted there came home rather upset on learning about the Cartoons at school. After reporting what was discussed among his friends he confided in his mother, "Mama I hope we don't do any such thing". Apparently, most children have better sense than us adults.

I am completely baffled as to why an Iranian website should launch a competition for cartoons of the Holocaust. First no Jewish newspaper has been involved in publishing the cartoons, second how can any sane Muslim, in spite of his condemnation of Israeli policies, extend his anger to a point where he stoops so low as to mock the suffering of the Jews in

Gestapo camps and their death in gas chambers? It is trite to debate that the number that perished at the hands of the Nazis was six million or six thousand. To propound that there were other people who have also been subjected to an equally terrible fate by no means belittles the pain and suffering of the Jews by the racist Nazi Germans. The terrible fates of other nations and people should be mourned in their own right.

Incidentally, Michael Leunig, a renowned Australian cartoonist, has sent the first contribution to the Iranian website on the subject of the Holocaust. In fact, according to a newspaper he has sent two cartoons. One shows a poor man with a Star of David on his back walking towards the infamous Auschwitz death camp in 1945 with the words, Work Brings Freedom, over the entrance. There is tragic play of irony in the words. The poor Jew forced to undergo terrible trials and hard labour on promise of freedom was the unforeseen freedom from life itself.

The second cartoon shows the same scene but depicting "Israel 2002" with the words "War Brings Peace" over the entrance and the same man walking towards it bearing a rifle. The cartoon brings into dramatic relief the lie that Israel is there to enforce peace in the region. It is however politically incorrect, and a lie to present the poor Jew who perished at Auschwitz as an agent of Zionism. All Jews are not Zionists. Just as all Germans were not Nazis.

As a people, most of us take pride in being irrational. Rational people we believe, may be wiser

but they are also calculating. But wisely enough, while equating rationality with restraint and even cowardice we do not compare irrationality with stupidity. Rather than make an impression on others, we get angry to convince ourselves of our own potency. While expressing our resentment caused by an adversary, we protest by burning down the buses, already in short supply, we need for commuting in the city. But "what goes of their father?" as they say in vernacular.

Such conduct reminds one of children who take to banging their head against a wall or break their own toy to register a protest with their mother. These tactics may work with a feeble-hearted mother but surely an adversary will care two hoots even if you jump off the wall or dig a hole to bury yourself.

I recall the late Eqbal Ahmad recounting to me a dialogue between a Vietnamese and a Palestinian revolutionary. The Palestinian asked with a lavish smile, "Comrade, tell me how do you make the revolution?" The Vietnamese requested, "Comrade, first you tell me how you do it." The Palestinian said, "Well we for instance burn the buses and destroy the bridges". Before he could proceed further the Vietnamese revolutionary informed him, "Look we neither burn the buses nor destroy the bridges". "Why not?" asked the Palestinian revolutionary. "Because", answered his Vietnamese comrade, "we ride the buses and need the bridges" adding "Comrade, revolution is like breaking a rock with eggs."

but they are also calculating. But wisely enough, while equating rationality with restraint and even cowardice we do not compare irrationality with stupidity. Rather than make an impression on others, we get angry to convince ourselves of our own potency. While expressing our resentment caused by an adversary, we protest by burning down the buses, already in short supply, we need for commuting in the city. But "what goes of their father?" as they say in vernacular.

Such conduct reminds one of children who take to banging their head against a wall or break their own toy to register a protest with their mother. These tactics may work with a feeble-hearted mother but surely an adversary will care two hoots even if you jump off the wall or dig a hole to bury yourself.

I recall the late Eqbal Ahmad recounting to me a dialogue between a Vietnamese and a Palestinian revolutionary. The Palestinian asked with a lavish smile, "Comrade, tell me how do you make the revolution?" The Vietnamese requested, "Comrade, first you tell me how you do it." The Palestinian said, "Well we for instance burn the buses and destroy the bridges". Before he could proceed further the Vietnamese revolutionary informed him, "Look we neither burn the buses nor destroy the bridges". "Why not?" asked the Palestinian revolutionary. "Because", answered his Vietnamese comrade, "we ride the buses and need the bridges" adding "Comrade, revolution is like breaking a rock with eggs."

Any protest, resistance or revolt – regarded stages for change - without clear political purpose, guidance of reason and rationality is often contrary to the people's interests. This may partly explains, why the police remained silent spectators to the mob going berserk in Peshawar. It only moved into action when the unruly crowd tried to march towards the Governor's House.

I just received a phone call informing that a crowd rampaging the city in protest against the blasphemous cartoons has taken hostage a Lahore police SP and is targeting private and public properties at will. I am told that a McDonald's restaurant and a Citibank branch have been attacked and the windows of the Punjab Assembly building have been smashed. Citizens are being advised to stay away and be careful. Otherwise, all is well.

(15 Feb. 2006)

Stability and Poise in Things at Rest

"There are some people who believe that our nuclear technology programme is also a by-product of our aphrodisiac concerns. I don't believe that this can be true. It is a pity that it has become a habit with us to be constantly frivolous."

In the colonial days, the blacks and browns were encouraged to abandon their traditional ways in order to better themselves. It was the only way they could save their soul and civilise themselves. The proper thing to do was to eat with knives and fork, only apes ate with their fingers. Lamb chops with mashed potatoes or roast beef with mint sauce was the thing to eat. Not gooey *Bhindi Gosht* or some bloody curry. How could *loosewalas* learn the benefits of being dressed in a trouser? You couldn't possibly play cricket wearing a *dhoti* or a *shalwar*. Wearing a *dhoti* even when pulled up and tied as a *langota* or *langoti* – depending on the gender wearing it – could make playing tennis particularly awkward and even embarrassing. What do you say? Imagine just when you were up in the air taking an overhead smash, it

slipped down to your feet? Of course, if you were right-handed, and while taking a volley, a dhoti could at least be held up with the left hand without having to dive down to grab it.

If perchance a person was required to wade through a stream a *dhoti* is far friendlier than being stuck in a pair of trousers. A *dhoti* is adaptable apparel. It can be easily managed and pulled up or drawn in accordance with the depth of water. If the water gets too deep, it can be easily taken off with considerable alacrity, without it getting wet or causing you any shame and flamboyantly carried across on a gentleman's head. Fortunately, gentlemen who play tennis don't have to wade through streams and natives who ever so often have to step into the water don't wear trousers – and a pair at that. I am sure that it must have been for this very reason that process the of colonisation began from the top. While a jacket and a necktie replaced our upper midriff garments, some of us *baboos* persisted for some time in sauntering around in the *shalwar*.

My grandfather who dressed rather elegantly insisted on wearing a jacket and a tie on *desi* occasions like attending a wedding or going for the *namaz* for Eid. It certainly set him aside from his relatives and most of the crowd. I never saw him wear a *desi jooti* because with a *shalwar* he preferred to wear the black patent leather *Gurgabi* with a silk bow tie. Frankly, our *desi* shoes are quite awful for walking. This of course excludes the fancy ones sold in the cities that are worn

in the evening. It takes ages for your feet to settle down in the real ones. Initially the pair has to be greased and rubbed with oil before the human foot can be slipped in.

Incidentally *desi juttis* are interchangeable. There is no distinction between a shoe for the left or the right foot. With time, the *jutti* moulds itself to the singular shape of the rural foot. Like un-saddled horses they have to be broken in with patience and inevitable pain that is best if heroically suffered. The sharp bite of the uncured leather is borne by the backside of the heel and the big toes. Regrettably, by the time a pair is broken in for comfortable transport, it starts to wither at the seams, which is a signal for ordering a new pair. But as the great English bard has said, "Life goes on with petty pace to the last citadel of recorded time". But jokes aside, from a strategic angle our *desi* shoes are rather well made and can be slipped off and on the feet in a jiffy and easily carried on head while maneuvering a water hazard. The most troublesome pairs, like a General's Swagger Stick are carried under the armpit. How sensible! It saves wear and tear of the shoes as well as the feet. Statistically speaking, I bet if distances were to be measured on the basis of reciprocity; a pair of *desi juttis* in their lifetime rides their owner for more distance than the mileage he gets out of them.

It is comforting to have things remain the same. There is stability and poise in things being at rest. There is a saying that the more you change the more

you remain the same. This is true, that is why, wisely, we don't make an effort to change. In the last one thousand years, as Sibte Hasan points out in his book *Pakistan Mein Tarikh Ka Irtiqa*, what has changed? You would be proud to learn how well we have stood our ground. The sickle is the same. The hammer and the axe are the same. The basic design of almost every animal-drawn vehicle has remained the same. Riding a Sindhi bullock cart transports the passenger to the days of Mohenjodaro.

In the past, God had given us everything we needed. There was no need really to look beyond our selves. We would go for Hajj, but not once did we become curious about finding out what was happening in Rome or London. We were quite content and full of ourselves and never cared to venture into strange distant places. We liked building temples, mosques, mausoleums, palaces, gardens and pavilions and architectural specimens of great strength and beauty. We patronised artists who established innumerable schools of sculpture and painting. We encouraged musicians who invented great many musical instruments and created *ragas* and *raginis* to express the seasons, changing moods of the day, essential human emotions and feelings of love, devotion, longing, and above all sentiments of joy and sadness.

We employed and patronised the arts and literature to enrich our selves and integrate the aesthetically and spiritually fragmented world. There

was in our land of plenty, no need for science to investigate and discover secrets of nature. Nature had so over indulged us that we never felt the need to seek her for more. We were never impelled to sail across the seas, walk great distances to look for better pastures. On the contrary, invaders who came looking for better pastures made it their home; except for the English of course.

We studied the stars, not for being compelled to chart our direction in deserts and the seas, but for predicting auspicious days. The scientific sphere was extremely limited and peripheral to our concerns. It was confined to the study of astrology, alchemy and aphrodisiacs. I must say that since then, there has been considerable advancement in these three traditional areas of "science".

Today, Advisors and Political Columnists have replaced the royal Astrologers and the Alchemists by peddlers, who can convert baser powder into gold. I have it on trust of a friend who dabbles in science, that international pharmaceutical companies are marketing aphrodisiacs which have been zapped with nuclear power. My friend, who is an honourable man, asserts that the pills can endanger life because it incites people to undertake the impossible. He also fears that these pills are likely to run our own *hakeems* out of business, which would certainly be unfortunate if it happens. This however seems unlikely because they are thriving on selling their traditional recipes to strengthen flaccid muscles as is evident from their

advertisements in the Urdu press and the graffiti scrawled on walls along the highways throughout the country. I must tell you that there are some people who believe that our nuclear technology programme is also a by- product of our aphrodisiac concerns. I don't believe that this can be true. It is a pity that it has become a habit with us to be constantly frivolous.

On the other hand, how can we possibly take pride in our nuclear technology, when we still can't produce a water tap that doesn't leak? It is natural for people to value only those things, which benefit their lives.

During Zia ul Haq's period, a determined effort was made to encourage science. An international conference on Islamic science was organised at Islamabad. Unfortunately, little was done to follow up the proceedings. In one of the papers presented at the conference, the delegates were reminded that since the *Jinns* (Genie), as every practising Muslim knows, were made from fire, they could be an unending source of power for our sick industry and domestic needs. Unfortunately, no one acted upon the recommendation, which while remedying many of our chronic social and economic ailments would have also broadened our scientific horizon from Astrology, Alchemy and Aphrodisiacs to Jinn power.

(28 April, 2003)

Part II

A Columnist's Chronicle **Journeys, Musings & Personal** **Echoes**

Contents

Part II:

- Now it was Pitch Dark 101
- Poverty Alleviation or Elimination 106
- Afghanistan – Afloat in Time 111
- Of loose-*Wallas* and *Sheedis* 117
- Take It or Leave It 123
- Art With and Without a Tongue 128
- *Graiban see liya mein ne* 133
- Tasting the Collective Good 137
- The Invasion 142
- The Afghanistan I Saw 147
- A Grumpy Heron and Inventive Hens 152
- *Khwaja's* Melting Pot 157
- To *Thal* with Friends 162
- A Spirit Which Must Not Die 167
- Humans in Divine Scheme of Things 172
- A Crow on the Parapet 177
- The Larger Picture 182
- Memories of Another Time 187
- Mickey Mouse and a Pile of Stones 193
- How Careless Can You Get? 198
- Eaters of Their Own Dead 203

- Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom 208
- Half-empty Glass of Water 215
- 'Thoughts too Deep for Tears' 220

Now it was Pitch Dark

August 14 came and pensively surrendered to another day. It rained most of the morning and we were without electricity the entire afternoon and the evening. The night descended earlier than usual, slowly effacing individual definitions making it hard for the eye to perceive distant objects. Only a *jaman* remained dimly visible, illuminated by the light from my window. A vine bearing broad leaves girdles the tree trunk struggling to ascend it.

For how long have we hoped that things would be better next year? Bravo my friends, we are like the peasant who sees his crop inundated by excessive rains, pelted by hail, starved by droughts and ravaged by pest attack, but stoically proceeds to plant the next crop in the belief that the coming season '*Rab khair karay ga*'. We all know now that when the harvest is good the market price registers instant descent. But we keep hoping and dreaming. Who can tell whether we do it to delude ourselves or to spur ourselves on?

On one very hot summer day there was a poor peasant sitting under a shade-less tree who declared in hearing of a farmer, "If I owned a *bhori* buffalo

[Golden brown buffalos are rare and believed to yield quality milk] I would milk her and prepare *kachi lassi* in a silver bowl. Next, I would put ice cubes in it. I would then leisurely drink it - occasionally stirring the ice with my finger."

The farmer, hot and thirsty, was greatly irked. While mopping large beads of sweat off his moist face asked,

"Do you own a *bhori* buffalo?"

"No, I don't", replied the peasant. "Do you possess a silver bowl?" asked the farmer again. "Actually no, I don't", was the reply.

"Do you at least have the ice?" the farmer patiently enquired again. "No, I don't have that either" the peasant confided.

"Then actually what do you have?" the farmer irritably asked. "Well, I have my finger." He replied, pointing up the forefinger.

What would we be without our small innocent dreams? Dreams and demands can greatly vary from a person to person. Amanullah, the popular comic and wit, once recounted to the audience that when a rich urban father asks his brat what he would like for his birthday, the child asks for a small but very expensive electronic toy he saw at a shop at Liberty Market; when a poor peasant asks his sun tanned Jheera with a shaven oblong head, what he can buy him at the village *mela*, Jheera demands, "*Abba, tu meinu hudwana lai day*". He wants a watermelon because

that is the biggest present, all he can think of is big; not realising that he can neither eat it all in one go, nor that he would have to carry the heavy load around from place to place the whole day in the mela. But this does not bother him. I recall when Amanullah narrated this at a variety programme it tickled me immensely but soon the irony sank in and glazed my eyes.

Everyone daydreams but the common American citizen is something else. He possesses the longest finger I have known for stirring the golden bowl of his fantasies. A person I know who lives near Boston recounted to me that one evening he was driving home in mild rain when he saw a grim image of a young white girl standing on the roadside. She stood lost, half drenched and shivering. Bashir, who suffers from sense of social responsibility, stopped the car, backed up to her and asked if he could give her a ride home. Solemnly, she peered at him and informed him that she didn't have a home. Her parents, she said, had thrown her out. For a moment Bashir was confused not knowing how to address the situation. Finally, he asked her to get in the car. Without a word, she got into the car and Bashir drove off to his house that was a short distance away.

On reaching his house Bashir asked her to follow and the girl timidly complied. She was asked to sit in the lounge while Bashir went up to his room from where he fetched a shirt and a pair of pyjamas, and asked her to change in the adjacent room so that she could dry her wet clothes. In the meantime, he looked

into the refrigerator for some food for her. The following day Bashir rented a room for her and bought her some essentials. After a few days when he thought Jenny had mentally revived, he drove her to his store and offered her a job. Within weeks she got back her humour and her complexion. Bashir found some satisfaction in that.

As I have mentioned, Bashir is supportive of anything that helps the under-privileged. That was the year of the American presidential elections. Bashir was unusually excited because he believed that the democrats would win. He tried, tactlessly, to try to persuade all customers to support the democrats, often getting into arguments with strangers.

One day Bashir noticed that Jenny seemed to have no interest in politics. He resolved to talk to her about it in general and the presidential elections in particular. At the first opportunity, as a way of opening the subject, he asked Jenny, "Who will you vote for in the elections." "I'll vote for the Republicans," replied Jenny definitively. Bashir was taken aback. "Jenny, why would you not vote for the Democrats?" Jenny, who only a few weeks earlier had been shivering in rags on a footpath, explained: "I will not vote for democrats because they take away money from the rich and give it to the poor." Bashir was totally dumbfounded, and has been ever since, he tells me.

Will the American people ever wake up, he quietly speculates.

That day, he spent the rest of the day sitting in his small, untidy office, staring through the window at the fluttering leaves and branches swaying in the breeze. He did not notice the sun go down. Before he realised, it was pitch dark. He jerked out of his chair to put the lights on.

(23 August, 2006)

Poverty

Alleviation or Elimination

Rarely do we think well of a person who has let us or others down. In reality the feeling may have more to do with our high expectations rather than any innate inadequacy or malevolence on the part of the other. Should one not have consideration for limitations of others?

Some individuals may not have the muscle while others may find loyalty beyond their means. I don't believe men are inherently bad or evil. Shakespeare and Marlowe who preceded him believed to the contrary. They thought that evil existed in its own right and motivated individuals to action. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides before them also believed in this.

With Marx we enter a world where individual conduct is determined by class interest and judged by its social effects. A person may harbour good motives but if he misappropriates the labour of others, he is an exploiter and therefore bad. Accordingly, those who are exploited and made to sweat for the rich are essentially good. In Marxian society the criterion of goodness is determined by a person's loyalty to the

working class. I believe once when Khrushchev informally bumped into Zhou En-Lai, at a peace conference in Geneva, he took a dig at Zhou by saying that while he himself was the son of a Russian coal miner, Zhou was the son of a Chinese mandarin. Zhou En-Lai did not deny the charge but added that there was at least one thing common between them, "You are a traitor to your class and I am a traitor to mine."

Sigmund Freud introduced psychoanalysis to fathom the mind and understand human conduct. He maintained that man was inherently a predator and his actions were largely determined by subterranean motivations, outside conscious awareness. He asserted that man's 'instinctual passions are stronger than reasonable interests'. He was of the view that human nature could not be changed. In the spiritual sense, does he not absolve the individual from being responsible for his deeds?

The Greeks and the Elizabethans ultimately held the individual morally responsible for whatever he did. Freud explained away individual responsibility. He viewed human conduct as a product of pathological causes. In the classical worldview, gods and witches often interfered with events. But since individual choice was never wrested from man, he was held accountable for his actions and made to suffer for them.

In the past man was primarily concerned with his individual redemption and worked for divine retribution through suffering. Sometime the high and mighty was made to go through trials without faults of

their own choosing. They were put to test because the gods willed it so. Jacob goes blind crying for the loss of his beloved son Joseph. Oedipus gouges out his eyes on discovering that he was bound in wedlock with his mother. Ironically, he begins to perceive more clearly than when he had eyes and could see. Moved by his suffering, the gods elevate him to become their equal. Oedipus becomes a god but tragically ceases to be human. In a sense it was an unfair, cruel and irrational world.

With Marx the preoccupation with individual redemption is replaced by the need for humans to collectively enhance and better themselves, which is inseparably linked with the struggle of the oppressed against all forms of oppression. Marx, unlike Freud, held that man was wholly good but the institution of private property had corrupted his nature.

In the contemporary world, how far can man be held accountable for his actions? I think it was the well-known existentialist novelist Albert Camus who observed that existentially for an individual in the modern world, it was a question of presuming to exercise choice where the choice didn't exist. Increasingly it is becoming difficult for man to determine his actions when the forces of market economy are taking over his life.

Most modern artists and writers who once upheld high social ideals are today content to work within the prevailing system. The collectors, the critics, the patrons and investors determine what an artist should paint, an author write and the cinema

produce. And yet shouldn't humans be accountable for whatever they do? Nothing sells today unless it is first converted into a commodity. Hasn't man himself been transformed into a commodity or getting dangerously close to it?

The day after Askari Mian Irani, a Lahore artist, unexpectedly passed away, I received a telephone call from a friend in Karachi. He wanted to know on behalf of an anxious collector, how Askari's paintings would be valued now that he was dead. It seems that nothing has intrinsic value. A society that does not cherish art for its intrinsic goodness and provides space for it, limits its own horizon.

Getting back to Freud, is it pertinent to ask whether a person should be forgiven for drowning babies, because as an infant his mother would not change his nappies? It is not easy to answer such questions. How does one resist the irresistible urge for theft or the irrepressible urge to rape or kill? In the past people were hung for stealing bread. Theft was considered a heinous crime. If a person with psychological disorder can be set free for manslaughter, why are not the misdemeanours of those afflicted with poverty and hunger treated with similar consideration? Is cutting of hands for petty theft, right? Should not slaves and the wretched of the earth have the right to rob and revolt? Why should some people sleep in soft warm beds and others freeze on a footpath? These are embarrassing questions. There are persons who actually believe that the poor are naturally better endowed to suffer the adversities

of life, including cold, heat and hunger. The common *Kikarand Beri* trees can thrive in the wild whereas the roses have to be carefully nursed and nurtured. Or so the rich believe. The rich are smooth and soft, whereas the poor are rough and hard. The rich have abundant comforts that make them vulnerable; the poor have generations of poverty, which makes them tough. How unfair for the rich?

I sometimes wonder why those who were once kindly disposed to the poor now talk of poverty. Poverty as a virtue of the Prophets was an elevated state of self-denial, which envisaged aesthetic simplicity and cherished virtue in restraint, whereas poverty as a social phenomenon means diarrhoea, ignorance, vice, lice, starvation and human degradation. Isn't it awful that this should be so when humans look across the cosmic frontiers, towards new worlds in the distant galaxies, while most of humanity lives in abject poverty? Poverty is not something that needs alleviation; it needs elimination. Should humans work for personal redemption or try to evolve into better humans? That is the real question. What we do in response to the answer will presumably determine who we are, what we can be.

(20 Feb. 2004)

Afghanistan – Afloat in Time

“One of the great ironies of history is that the very people who came to save Afghanistan, claiming to liberate it from its enemies, plundered the one museum which did not have a single stolen item.”

Very few visitors to Kabul ever pay homage to the Emperor Babur, who unlike his vain descendants, does not rest in an exalted mausoleum but sleeps on the eastern flank of a plain hill out precincts of Kabul. Babur possessed an incredible eye for detail and beauty. He never forgot the memory of a spring morning when cantering along this hill on his way to India he saw its slope ablaze with blossoms. Surely the young prince must have stopped to nourish his eyes with the sight. Babur became the emperor at Delhi but desired to be buried on the slope of the same hill, which he had seen cascading with blossoms in his youth. Babur would rather lie in solitude among the wild bushes, which blossomed each spring, than be entombed in cold marble, condemned to eternal silence.

On visiting Babur's grave in the early seventies, I found it without a tomb, open to the sky. This is how

surely, he would have liked it. Someone in recent times added a modest metal fence and small sloping rectangular canopy. To our surprise and great luck, the wild bushes were in bloom. I wistfully held a sprig in my hand bearing buds the colour of burgundy; flowers with petals of lighter hue receding to pink.

As I cautiously held the blossoms in my hand, so as not to injure them in any way, it seemed centuries had ticked away in a moment. I felt as though it was only yesterday that Babur had reined his stead to gaze at this spectacle of intense colour. Delicately holding a spray in his hand Babur must have wondered what life was all about. Not finding an answer he must spurred the flanks of his horse and without a further thought galloped off towards his destiny waiting before him.

The next day we visited the Kabul Museum. It was one of the most unique museums that one could ever see. Nothing in the Kabul Museum is a result of plunder. Most exhibits at the museum have been exhumed from Afghanistan. I could not believe the great range of delicate objects, reposing in the polished wooden cabinets with clean glass panels, could possibly all have been excavated from a mountainous rugged country. There were Chinese silks, glassware, from Alexandria, Roman medallions and Buddhist statues. One of my favourites was a three feet tall, seated Buddha statue in terracotta. There were Indian ivories – among these I was particularly allured by an exquisite jewellery casket.

The casket had figures of graceful women carved on its panels, which are similar in conception to the feminine forms painted in the frescoes at the Ajanta caves. I assumed that the casket belonged to a later Ajanta period, say eighth century AD. When I peered closely at a small card fixed adjacent to the casket, it stated that the object belonged to 200 A.D., which meant that it anticipated the best specimens of Ajanta Fresco paintings by at least one to two hundred years. What made the Indian Ivories in the Kabul Museum so special is that on account of humid and wet climate no ivories have survived in the Indian subcontinent.

Begram, an hour's run from Kabul, where most of the Museum exhibits were excavated, was the Rome of the ancient world. If one looks at a map of the times, allroads go through Begram. All the silk routes or trade route caravans halted and rested at Begram before parting company to go their ways South to India, South-West towards Persia on to Egypt or West to Rome or Eastwards to China. The silver and gold medallions from Rome, the gentle glassware from Egypt, the patterned silk from China and carved ivories from India were all exhumed at Begram.

The Metropolitan Museum, the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert, the Louver and many other museums of the world have their priceless possessions at the expense and loss of others. They are stolen or forcibly taken through aggression and occupation. One of the great ironies of history is that the very people who came to save Afghanistan,

claiming to liberate it from its enemies, plundered the one museum, which did not possess a single stolen item. There is a saying that if you have friends like these you don't have to look for enemies.

The Taliban demonstrated gross insensitivity to the religious feelings of Buddhists and ignorance of history by destroying the two gigantic images Lord Buddha, which stood for centuries peacefully surveying the Bamian Valley. The Americans have also shown extremely bad taste in converting Begram into an operational base, and a centre for interrogating Taliban and Al Qaeda suspects.

After the incendiary attack on two National Libraries and destruction and theft of 170,000 priceless artefacts from the Iraq National Museum there is little to be said, since "stuff happens" as one of the "liberators" said. However, in both cases not merely the national history of Afghanistan and Iraq has been destroyed but the common history of all mankind has also been obliterated. The visit to Ghazni was not without mixed feelings. Some Muslims applaud Mahmood Ghazni for being a dauntless soldier of Islam. Most Hindus hate him for being a bigot. Mahmood in reality was neither a soldier of Islam nor a bigot who plundered temples for religious reasons. His purpose behind invading the subcontinent more than seventeen times was not for Islam as some historians claim. Khwaja A Hayee for instance writes, "How bravely Sultan Mehmood had managed to cross the deserts of Sind and Rajputana to

reach his far-off target Somnath, is a story of unique determination and implicit faith in Allah." There can't be anything more remote from the truth. Mr Hayee while writing is serving the cause of his espoused ideology and not the cause of history.

The reason that Mahmood of Ghazni invaded Somnath was to plunder gold in order to build a feudal empire. The only religious inclination he ever expressed was to attack and destroy the Muslim kingdom of Multan, which owed its allegiance to the Fatamid Caliphate. At that time the Caliphate had split into two rival camps and Sultan Mahmood was aligned with the Caliphate of Baghdad. Whatever the reason, there is no justification for the Sultan to desecrate a temple and plunder it for wealth.

Sultan Mahmood liked to have writers, poets and men of learning around him. According to Nicholas Barrington, a Persian scholar and a former British High Commissioner to Pakistan, "Some writers have described him, not so much a patron of letters as a kidnapper of literary men," because it added to his prestige to have famous poets and scholars around him. This may be a bit unkind because the Sultan is known to have set up many libraries.

He also established a famous university of the time, which we saw on our visit. It was being used as a school. We also visited the great Sultan's palace, which was built with aesthetic restraint and devoid of opulence usually associated with palaces. The name of Sultan Mahmood Ghaznavi who was the most

powerful ruler of the age was also tarnished, when he avoided suitably rewarding Firdausi for writing the Shahnama, which the Sultan had commissioned him to write. It is worth noting that Sultan Mahmood had asked Firdausi not to write a history of Islam, but about the popular legends of early Persian pre-Islamic dynasties. The Shahnama comprises of 60,000 verses compared to only 10,500 in Milton's "Paradise Lost". According to Barrington it can be compared to the greatest epic poets of the world like Virgil and Dante. It is said that eventually the huge fee, which Firdausi had expected, arrived, just when his coffin was being carried out of the city for burial. Unfortunately, the great Sultan had defaulted and has never lived it down to this day.

Of loose-Wallas and Sheedis

"Strangely the appellative Sheedhi has been derived from Sheeda, which is an endearing way of referring to a chap named Shahid."

Julie, former wife of my friend Hamid, observed once that whenever she ventured into Lahore's old walled city, she never ever had a problem. Whenever she needed help, she would accost a *loosewala* - a person wearing *salwar* or *dhoti* - who would extend it politely without any fuss. But a *sheedi* in trousers was usually trouble. Incidentally the term *Sheedi* designates a person who is a traditional denizen of the Walled City. Strangely the appellative has been derived from Sheeda, which is an endearing way of referring to a chap named Shahid.

Sheeda demonstrates natural flare for exaggeration, which outsiders often regard as bragging. Sheeda speak in terrible hurry and love to flavour their words with the sound of letter R. Things have changed now, but I am talking of the seventies, when Lahoris were cordial to all visitors. Lahoris would go out of their way to help, guide, and even help settle their disputes over fares with the *tong* or a

rickshaw drivers. Sheedis were, and remain, a smart lot. They can outsmart anyone. They may look naïve but certainly not innocent. But it is also true most Sheedhis consider it not right that a stranger should be fooled. Even in those days there were few who argued that why shouldn't a buck be made off a tourist, because a *gora* could afford it? Most Lahoris counter-argued pleading that it would not be right. They took no offence at being called a *chamcha* (lackey) of the *goras* insisting that taxi and rickshaw drivers should charge the right fare. Knowing this, Julie casually sauntered into lanes and alleys without hesitation. Whenever she strayed or got lost, she had to hail a sheedhi who would instantly stop and come to her help. She endeavoured to avoid sheedhi in trousers, who would try her patience by trying to strike an acquaintance by impressing upon her his inventive facility in spoken English.

Actually, when a Sheedi is seemingly familiarising with a *mem*, he is actually trying to demonstrate his command of English. The ability to speak English sets an individual apart from other indigenous varieties. Socially, it is regarded as an instrument of power. An idiot who can fumble in English has a higher social profile than a Punjabi, Saraiki or a Potohari intellectual who can speak, howsoever fluently, his own tongue. That is why many men and women insist on conversing in English. Even our ulema, who in the past, punctuated their sermons with quotes in Arabic, like to throw around English

phrases and words to establish that they are no common mullahs.

There was this chap from Mirpur who went to have a meal at *Barkatey dee Kafee*. Barkat's Café was a very special place, famous for the best curries in Bradford. After he had made himself comfortable, he asked the waiter who also came from Mirpur, 'what, what is?' Meaning. what do you have? The waiter courteously informed him, 'All is'. That everything was available. At which the customer enquired, 'Head and foot is.' The waiter instantly replied, 'Is'. The customer was pleased and said, 'Bring.' The Mirpur gentleman polished off a large plateful of sheep's head and trotters. He was pleased but his heart was not full and he urged for more. Licking his fingers, to make the taste linger longer in his mouth, he waived at the waiter and after informing him 'Taste has come!' asked for more, 'Please bring and'.

Most readers must have heard the joke and may find it amusing, but there is also a serious aspect to it. They say in Rome one should do as the Romans do. I find the two Mirpuris setting an excellent example of doing precisely that, speaking English even if it was at slight variance from what the natives customarily spoke in England. If these two gentlemen had not made the pioneering effort, we would not be doing business with the western world with the confidence our overseas compatriots have kept up. Frankly, English doesn't have to be the one spoken at Buckingham Palace. The Rednecks and the Black

Americans, in fact the Americans in general, the Australians, the Irish, the South Asians all speak English with their own particular idiom and accent. I remember, back in the sixties, a BBC television serial, *Steptoe and Son*, in which the actors spoke the London cockney, which frankly I adore because in spite of Labour Parties political decadence I find an affinity with the British working class. The serial, wisely enough, was shown with subtitles in the US. The English were terribly riled at what they regarded was a cheeky affront by a former colony.

During summer vacations the Pakistani students were usually stranded in Cambridge, once in a while crossing the channel, mostly making hectic weekend trips to London. In those days we wrote weekly letters back home. If there was something urgent, telegrams were dispatched. There was little else to do. But what made Cambridge more interesting than Oxford, particularly in the summer vacations, was the invasion of continental girls who would descend there with the intention of learning English. Apparently, there were scores of language schools around. With Cambridge practically empty, the Pakistanis had to single-handedly amuse the invaders. Most of them strode in from France, Holland, Germany, Spain and Italy, though I also remember a Greek girl, because she was cast in a form visualised by the famous French-born modern sculptor Aristide Maillol. Most of these ladies spoke little English; naturally, because learning English was why they were there. The students who came from Pakistan all loved to hear their own voice,

and now that the English students were away, felt more than a little proud of their facility in speaking English. They would often forget that the girls had only rudimentary acquaintance with English, yet they wasted their breath on weaving yarn to impress them. I remember asking Shahid, a friend, why he looked so terribly peeved. He replied, sulking sheepishly, 'Look at this silly woman. I tell her a long funny joke hoping she would burst into laughter but all she has to say in solemn German accent was, 'I dhan't undherstaand'. He never dated her again or wasted time on telling jokes or forming ornate sentences for effects.

A *mem* is a *mem* even if she can't speak or understand English. I distinctly recall there was a song, which began with the words, '*Mem balli-ay*'. *Desi* loves everything *vilayati*. The only good things known to be *desi* are *desi ghee*, *desi goat* and *desi chicken*. There is nothing else *desi*, which has a virtue. *Desi* wheat admittedly was once greatly prized but it is no more. A farmer cannot find enough of it to seed even a quarter of an acre. Talking of seeds, unless we take heed, we will lose all the wonderful traditional *desi* varieties of vegetable and grain seeds, assuming that we haven't lost most of them already. The *shabdegh* the Kashmiris cook these days is not the real thing. The traditional turnip required at least twelve hours to simmer with the meat before it was considered cooked. That turnip, what a tragedy, is no more.

But back to *vilayati* things, the English just mismanaged the whole thing. There was at least a

smooth continuity in the colonial rule without these martial laws intermittently thrust upon us. A sustainable autocratic system, as Bush has pontificated, is much better than a 'dysfunctional democracy'. The Quaid, unaware of this wisdom, won freedom for Pakistan so that people could rule themselves. It was established for no other reason. It is also baffling why there was a need to create Pakistan if it was just a matter of religion. The English didn't care how the Muslims liked to practice their faith. All sects had freedom to be beholden to their beliefs and individual interpretations of the Holy Quran and Sunnah. The English were not bothered how each Muslim liked to grow his beard, have a moustache or not to have one, have an ankle staring at you or hidden to an enquiring eye. They were not concerned, who their subjects worshipped. Religion was a matter of individual belief. I am told that in the army messes, no one was allowed to discuss politics and religion. I wonder when, and why did the army stop this practice after independence.

(2003)

Take It or Leave It

I am a romantic – in so many words. The Left regards romanticism a deviation; the Right considers it a sin. While Romanticism has its faults, I think the Classicists are more inclined to tell lies than the Romantics. Some call Romantics fools, because the Revolutionaries were nothing but romantics. But I'd dispute that. Passion and idealism cannot be foolish even though making revolutions against overwhelming odds may seem to verge on foolishness.

Most Leftists would rather have the romantics purged from their ranks while the Right-wingers would have them castrated. So, what's to be done? The Left won't let them love; the Right won't let them make love. Neither would let them go the whole hog.

But while Classicism is supposedly founded eternal principles that actually crystallise into dogmas, Romanticism will not let it be fettered. The Communist Manifesto at its conclusion invites the workers of the world to unite for they, "have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win." Lenin wrote chaste prose but without emotional crescendos. Marx inspires; Lenin had a job to do. I

presume the first astronauts were romantics, but those who map the universe with a telescope have to possess a more orderly mind.

Romantics by their very nature and temperament are a bit crazy. The classicists pander to tangible form; the romantics are chased by amorphous passion. The best of modern realism or neo-realism in literature, painting and the cinema is a product of Romanticism. Most fascists and authoritarian regimes try to adopt an orderly classical appearance. They patronise obedience, spurn abandon. Passion and emotions are regarded subversive for they cannot be tamed. But while I may be a romantic at heart, I was never one in the real sense. All I could do was to have coffee at Lintotts in Murree, sifting the crowd going up and down the generous slope of the Mall, and let my heart flutter at a new face (or was it the gait) each day, while nibbling a nimble chicken sandwich for which the restaurant was famous. One of the delicious attributes of Romanticism is its endless reservoir of fantasy. A romantic can be anywhere, at any time, with anyone. He can be with Marilyn Munroe and Madhubala at the same time or for that matter with the charismatic Romy Schneider and the awesome Anita Ekberg.

A romantic can sail with Agamemnon to Troy to punish Paris, who absconded with Helen his host Manlius's wife, while he was carousing on another island. He can as easily take a stand with Paris and Hector against the Greeks to defend Helen with a "face

that launched a thousand ships" who had no desire to live with her old and obese husband Menelaus the prince of Sparta. A romantic can out- jump and out-sprint anyone at the Olympics, hit a bouncer out of the stadium or thrash a bully three times his own size to impress a woman. A person with a wild imagination can never be lost in the wilderness. A thing imagined should be considered half done.

I was recently in Murree. It is not the Murree of my youth. It looked terribly unfamiliar. For private gain and vulgar taste, Murree is being destroyed. Things have changed and are changing for the worse. The tennis courts adjacent to the Marina Hotel have been converted into a car park. The hotel itself has disappeared behind the commercial buildings that have risen on both sides of the road, which descends to Sunny Bank from next to the church. The famous view of Marina Hotel painted by Ali Imam in the fifties that was reproduced in a foreign magazine is no more.

Ali Imam has also gone but life goes on as usual – for some, however, with a difference. The Sunset Point down the Mall levels out, for convenience of strollers set off for their evening jaunt for Pindi Point, has also been blocked by commercial high-rise structures. The cool panoramic view of the distant mountains and radiant sunsets has been permanently erased out of sight. More people go to the hill resort than ever before but not for its coniferous trees, ferns, and blue bells, wild roses, and daisies, azure and cloudy skies. Sadly, we often over burden things we

love. The resort once referred to as the Queen of the Hills has become so over populated and over built that I fear one of these summer weekends a toilet commode will be flushed and the Murree Hills will burst asunder with a massive thunder.

The good thing is that the monkey population has multiplied. If they continue to procreate at this pace, they may inevitably outnumber us and demand their original rights of possession. A friend accompanying us to Nathia Gali, forty km away from Murree quipped, "very soon the monkeys will demand their right of vote and then outnumber us in the Parliament." Another friend responded, "I don't mind that if they don't rig the Elections or worse declare Martial Law and rig the Constitution". "If they get access to a match box they may do exactly do that," added another. I noticed that at regular intervals during our journey, the road side 'corn on the cob' vendors had entered into a joint venture with the monkeys. Tourists buy the corn from the vendors and feed the monkeys. Everyone is happy. But I thought the monkeys looked a trifle lazy and unseemly in their deportment.

I am presently invaded by pensive thoughts that have transported me across the border into the India of Sonia Gandhi? A lot has been written about why she declined to be the prime minister. I am of the romantic view that in her private moments she never thought of becoming a beneficiary of her beloved husband's assassination. Reader may detect iota of male

chauvinism in my conjecture, but it is a romantic one.
At least it is a more humane than the insensitive and
heartless ones framed by some elements in the BJP.
Take it or leave it – I am a romantic.

(2 June 2004)

Art With and Without a Tongue

Much of the art today needs to be explained by words. This is regrettable because it indicates that the social link between the artist and the viewer has been severed. It is argued that the artist in a mega city does not share common existence with the community; he is lonely life in an anonymous crowd. Denied a social context, he is neither willing nor impelled to communicate with anyone. He is disenchanted with the tangible reality that surrounds him and finds it immoral as well as elusive. Baffled by the world, estranged from fellow humans, he withdraws into himself and invents a language of his own to express personal concerns. He speaks in a tongue often incomprehensible. Often, his objective is not to reach out but exist in his private space. Fortunately, there are clever critics who make the artist's intentions known to us.

What makes a critic's life difficult is that he is not merely required to explain art but also to market it. There is danger, of course, even in explaining art. It can easily get explained away. In painting, for instance, the viewer can only proceed to comprehend art after his aesthetic sense and feelings have been aroused.

The best critics take a short cut; escort the viewer to an art work and then let him know what he needs to know. It is a sad state of affairs that a work of art actually cannot have value unless it is solemnised into a commodity. If a work of art lacks market value, can it still have merit? I am afraid not! Having lost the high moral ground the artist is no longer accepted as a seer or custodian of what is best in the human spirit and values.

Is it possible for the artist to regain the place he has occupied in society since the beginning of human history? Today, more than ever, artists are needed to repair our dented vision. It is time for the artists to come forth, speak up and articulate their concerns about themselves and about the world of which they are the trustees. I recall that Sadequain was an unstoppable talker but most of the artists among us prefer silence. I suppose it is better to be mute and look wise then open one's mouth only to appear commonplace. It is important for artists to reflect on their work and the times they live in and give words to their thoughts. The most penetrating observations about art have always been those of the artists' - recorded mostly in personal correspondence, journals, conversations, witty observations and light-hearted comments.

The world, it seems, is becoming increasingly inexplicable for artists living in New York, Paris or London. Yet the artists struggling, say in most of Asia, have no such problem. They can clearly relate the

effects to the causes; make the distinction between the cool colours of dawn and the raging colours of damnation, the world as it is and the way it should be. Of course, there are some who find greater satisfaction in fondling themselves or descending into the dark recesses of their minds. They would rather not be encumbered with the vivid sights of life or 'molested' by the bitter odours of common concerns. While Asian artists have a significantly better perspective to the world today than their contemporaries in the First World, many of them they are undergoing the pain of rebirth. The Asian artists are beleaguered by their past as well as the oppressive post-colonial state structures they have inherited and the deceptive neo-colonialism.

During the colonial period when the contradiction between the rulers and the ruled sharpened in South Asia - in the beginning of the 20th century - the artists tried to excavate their past and revive ancient myths and traditions. During this period there were essentially three options for the artist. First, one could gain from and enlarge upon frescoes of Ajanta and the miniature paintings of Mughal, Pahari and the Rajput schools. Chughtai spearheaded this trend in the Punjab and Abanindranath Tagore in Bengal.

The second option was to connect with 'untarnished' rural life and adopt manners and techniques of the village craftsmen and imbibe from them their simple humanity and art forms. Jamini Roy

was inspired by the spontaneous manner in which they visualised images and motifs. Amrita Shergill was motivated in her words by the desire to "interpret India and principally the life of the Indian poor". Zain ul Abedin became "famous overnight" for capturing the suffering of three million peasants and urban poor whose emaciated bodies and corpses lay scattered all over Bengal in the terrible famine. Qamar ul Hassan recounts how in his youth he was thrilled to see, "featureless lump of clay come to life with a few strokes" by a traditional doll-maker. The third way was to learn the procedures and methods of European art. Raja Ravi Varma, Ustad Allah Baksh and Bevan Petman practised this.

By the middle of the 20th century there were many progressive groups in existence. While some of these were proclaimed radicals, like Zain ul Abedin, the majority of them had progressive intentions but were moulded by a liberal consciousness. They focused on folk traditions or rendered abstract human issues. This group includes Indian and Pakistani artists like M.F. Hussain, Shakir Ali and Sadequain. According to Geeta Kapur, M.F. Hussain has been engaged in the portrayal of India and brings out the villagers in the form of animated puppets right into the present presumably to be carried forward by the "liberal vanguard" - marching in the Nehru tradition. In this reference Sadequain - compared to Shakir Ali - is visibly far more outspoken about social issues. Shakir's world is a private, submissive world where Leda is raped by Zeus in the form of a swan, where

birds long to fly and be free of their cage. His work is delightfully pensive and pervaded with almost an infectious sense of loss. Sadequain's work, on the other hand, has many moods. He demands that his hero/artist fearlessly walk to the gallows, tread on the thorns of life without a wink and use his own blood to paint his canvases. He regards man as discoverer and inventor and the measure of all creation. He has (in the Lahore Museum) portrayed peasants and workers as the revolutionary vanguard of our times. Is this art or pursuit of an ideology? A hundred years ago such a question was never raised. Today when great virtue is acceded to meaninglessness and obscurity, and meaning extracted from living realities given a back seat, there is all the more reason that the question be answered.

(13 Sep, 2006)

Graiban see liya mein ne

There was a time when we lived in a different world. It was a world where people's hopes were green. They hoped that those would soon bear fruit with the change of seasons. Every person had his dream and vision of a more worthy world. There was a sense of togetherness nurtured by common ideals. People were inspired by literature and abstract thought and believed that these refined feelings propelled the human spirit.

It was a world where self-denial was considered a virtue. Art and poetry were regarded as creative acts of passion. Some went so far as to say that they 'encroached' upon a transcendental reserve. It was considered best for a poet to tread modestly in the sacred precincts, preferably on a subsistence of simple bread and plain apparel.

Sahir Ludhianvi informs in a poem that it is only after the poet has abandoned love, that he undertakes to repair his torn shirtfront, "*Mohabbat tark key mein nay, greyban see liya mein ne.*" The artist and the poet were expected to walk up to tyrants, bearing their heads on the palm of the hand; paint or write with the brush or the pen dipped in colour of their own blood. The artist and the poet were challenged to live their

ideals before putting them on paper or a canvas. The opening couplet to Sahir's *Talkhian* "I am returning whatever life has given me in the form of experience and misfortunes" is representative of the tradition. The ideals of contemporary art are at variance with such 'ideological ravings'.

It was a time when people were ripe in their resolve, prepared to wait on their toes to realise their dreams. They were men of substance who kept the flame of life burning in prevailing darkness or to address them by - borrowing a line from Sahir again, "*Daur e khizan mein bhe teri kalyan khilee rahein*" (you buds continued to bloom even during season of autumn).

Life is quite strange. A person pursues success but it escapes him; another is indifferent and finds it posted at his door. A person is anxious to make money but money will not come; another absorbed in a passion finds it following him around like a pet dog. It would be wise for talented people not to waste their time in chasing money but to let it track them while they pursue their passion. The money will come, ironically when they have surmounted the urge for it. Being greedy is, in any case, unwise and unprofitable. The wise say that creative ideas elude the greedy poet; power of healing the greedy doctor.

Greed distracts the doctor to reflect; diagnose. As common measure, a doctor will heal less that counts number he treats, than the number he heals.

A painter that paints without inspiration will inevitably produce inept and dead works. Like doctors

who have common prescriptions up their sleeve to address common ailments, some painters adopt readymade formulae to cater to popular taste. It is art not created through a process of self-enlightenment and aesthetic fulfilment but manufactured for the marketplace to be sold like any other commodity. Surely no one has been reported to have died from ill effects of art, but works 'manufactured' in commitment for market consumption cannot be expected to enhance in any way person's aesthetic sense and feelings.

The words like 'commitment', 'honesty', and 'sincerity' - and many such lesser brown ones - are an anathema to modern market values.

In the not very distant past things were by and large divided into good and bad. Please don't confuse the issue by asking, what good is. What is generally understood to be good' regarded good and is good for humanity should be a good enough good for individuals; not the other way round. Today good is looked at differently. What is personally profitable is regarded as good. Once it was expected of a person to stand by causes, today people are divided by hate and prejudice. Better wages for labour, universal education and healthcare may have produced a more rational society.

Today 'rationality' has become devoid of reason, and reason itself has been poisoned by self-interest. The real issues that concern our existence are inundated with rhetoric of hate and concerns for afterlife. People wear their brand of religion rather

violently. A man proud of his piety is an actor. Faith is a private matter, an article for daily social employment. There were a time people said "*Neki kar aur koayn mein dal*" (Do good and drown its memory in a well). Many individuals go collecting *sawab* in the mosque, akin to the way person collect money in a shop. Virtue is not just a private possession; it is formed through social practice. That is also true of good intentions and virtuous resolves that must each day rise to see the light of day.

It is tragic that while many live for the moment, most prefer to live in the past and combat over it. Persons in fair number are also keen about the future, of which innumerable plan to proceed to heaven. A person or nation that doesn't work hard for the future will go nowhere. Nations that cannot solve the Sphinx's riddle of their time are either enslaved by tyrants or wiped off God's earth.

A person who is selfish, insensitive to the pain of others, not revolted by lies and angered by injustice will get nowhere. A nation or a person lacking the resolve to walk into the future will die in the present, and how so ever glorious their past, will die with them. The road to heaven meanders through mysterious paths to future prospects. Heavens cannot be accessed by simply sitting on a mat counting individual virtues.

(1 March 2006)

Tasting the Collective Good

"Bush and company needed to build a new democratic Iraq. In the same spirit Nero burnt Rome to give the Romans a better city. What a laudable and splendid agenda."

There must be more than one way of cooking *Bhindi*, or what in English we call Lady Fingers. I wonder why in England they should be called okras. I also cannot understand our *Baingan* be called Brinjal by the English, Aubergine by the French and Eggplant by the Americans? Things can have more than one name, I suppose.

Most of us love eating *Bhindi*. I have found meat cooked with *Bhindi* rather good. Without offence to vegetarians, I prefer when vegetables are cooked with meat. Meat acquires a distinctive flavour of the vegetable with which it is cooked. Compare for instance, *shabdeg*, where large chunks of meat are slowly cooked with turnips with the one that has been in company of potatoes, or for that matter with *karailas* (bitter- gourd) and your taste buds would find each has its own individual taste and piquancy. We don't like our *Bhindi* to be soggy. We prefer to like

them spiced and crispy dry. The old *desi Bhindi*, almost impossible to find now, used to be something else. It was large and crisp, pregnant with scores of smooth pliant seeds, which added to the taste. The best *Bhindi* in town was without a doubt cooked by our respective grandmothers in a terra cotta pot on a slow fire. The old *desi Bhindi* plant was tall and lanky and provided only a few *Bindis* at a time for the *handi*. The present-day dwarf hybrids are like small bushes and are in profusion leaden *Bhindis* but they are small and flaccid, with very small seeds, which while eating, one cannot even feel rolling around in the mouth. Have you ever had *bhindi* the way they cook it in South India? They like to have them when they are in a superannuated state. These hard ripe okras are then allowed to slowly simmering in water and spices till the turgid curry becomes nice and gluey.

In England in the sixties, before fresh okras began to be imported from Kenya, they were sold, cooked, and packed in round tins, in the South Indian style. I remember an *angrez*, scanning through the menu of Shalimar Restaurant in Cambridge; ask his companion what he thought of okras? 'It is a most ghastly dish!' was the instant reply. I can imagine people used to eating fried fish and chips, stiff sausages and kidneys, would find South Indian okra curry a bit gluey. Actually, if you have them with the thick *khameeri roti* as people do in Quetta they can be quite nice. Those who insist on holding a different view can always use the curry in urgency for sealing envelops.

Individual tastes can differ, but surely there is more than one way of doing things. But everyone is adamant that his grandmother cooked okras the best. No harm letting people believe that. It is hard to persuade anyone to surrender what he believes. Beliefs are a product of lifelong personal experience and social interaction. They are thus a valued possession. To abandon a belief is like erasing a part of one's self. There is often a wide gap between personal experience and facts, between beliefs and reality. The disparity can partly be narrowed through a richer social practice. Real knowledge is the sum total of personal experience and accumulated knowledge of others. To gain knowledge one needs to keep the eyes and ears open, and – mostly – the mouth shut. Only then can a person objectively perceive and feel the fleeting moments of revelation in the commonest things through which truth manifests itself. All truths are transitory. There are no ultimate truths. The only permanent truth is change. Those who assert the permanence of ultimate truths are gross or selfish, or too lazy to adjust to what is right and must be done each new day. There is a sense of comforting permanence in holding on to prejudices. With prejudices, life is static but steady. Life is absolved of the pressures of constant intellectual engagements. It is extremely demanding to have to think where one should be standing, or who one should be supporting and defending each day. Having to judge the world and the conduct and actions of others is fraught with the danger of having to make

commitments. What would then a person do with his bagful of tribal, ethnic, religious, patriotic loyalties? Surveying the world from this discomforting perspective, a person might discover that Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Muslims and others may claim to represent monolithic truths, but being humans are all a motley crowd of this and that and what not. The majority likes not to be bothered, and to be left in peace. The vast majority of the world citizens would just like to raise their families and lead peaceful lives doing little things and being happy in their small achievements. This is not too much for them to demand. Is it?

The world in spite of latitudinal and longitudinal differences, with great oceans separating the continents is full of good men and women. This was amply demonstrated by their joint protest against the Iraq war. The war could not be stopped because Bush and company needed to build a new democratic Iraq. In the same spirit Nero burnt Rome to give the Romans a better city. What a splendid agenda. Nero played the flute while Rome burnt. Bush will not stop at burning the world, if he could have his way, to improve it.

There are always good aspects to bad things, which can help to propel events in the right direction. The solidarity, which was demonstrated by the world citizens, could never have been perceived before the Iraq war. Their action has demonstrated beyond dispute that the people of the world regardless of how

they prefer their *Bhindi* cooked, like peace better. They have carved a large area of common perception and feelings, which needs to be strengthened and upheld. Meanwhile, let us oppose all kinds of martial music, regardless of the instruments it is played with.

(26 August, 2003)

The Invasion

Crows and kites are multiplying into frightening numbers. Everywhere you find them comfortably perched on ledges and trees or gliding in circles. Kites, once characterised as aloof birds, have taken to intruding upon people and are quite undeterred by the threats promised to them.

Admittedly crows, a terrestrial bird - wonder if you agree - never had a reclusive nature, but even they are now more disdainful of people. Some crows croak at all hours and reportedly come in all colours. In the past it was rare for crows to croak at night or even on a summer afternoon. If ever a crow croaked at an odd time, it was considered a cause for concern.

For most birds the night and summer afternoons are times to sleep and hide from the blazing sun. Humans did the same before air-conditioning was introduced. Life ceased an hour or two after midday.

The modern crow is an avaricious breed. It is a great go-getter, always on the move. Once the crows sported around in ones and twos, now they move in brigades. They are positively unbearable, but what can one do? They are vagabonding around everywhere.

There is one that intermittently croaks throughout the night in our neighbourhood.

I know of a wise old aunt of a friend who would order a rooster's head to be instantly severed if it *cukkaroo gharooned* at night or even a few minutes before daybreak. She regarded it a bad omen and would not take the chance of having it repeated. She was very particular about punctuality, too, and insisted that everyone carry an accurate watch. Personally, I don't care where and at what time roosters prefer to croak but how I do wish that someone strangle our crow. The invasion of kites - essentially an aerial bird - is equally perturbing. It is perplexing why modern kites don't whistle as frequently as they did in the past. I remember how sharply they screeched when they attacked an intruder or dived to snatch their share of meat traditionally offered by the Lahoris on their rooftops every morning.

What ails their heart that they have ceased to whistle as of yore? Actually, most of us, too, don't whistle happy tunes anymore. Even the husky mules have become mute. It is wise of them not to bray and let others with better-dyed hair do it for them.

The crow outside the window is at it again. It is dusk, the most pensive moment of the day. The crow is a familiar bird and yet so unpredictable. The other day a pair alighted on a basin full of water left in the open for the birds. They spent quite a few moments preening at each other. It was a rare sight. Normally

they are tentative and watchful. After they were through with their business, they casually flew off. In an emergency, or to protect their larger strategic interests, they can deploy the reserve force armed with sturdy sharp beaks to restrain the enemy.

Bulbuls are small in size but have sharp beaks. They are the bane of the kinnoo grower's life. Bulbuls love piercing kinnoos. A pierced kinnoo, as all kinnoo eaters must have experienced, rots quickly. Bulbuls are ferocious protectors of their nesting place and in a wink dart off at any crow in closer than acceptable proximity. In spite of the Urdu poets, I have never particularly cared about bulbuls.

The other day, despite my reservations about bulbuls I was surprised to observe an aspect of the bird's character I had not noticed hitherto. In a birdbath, or to term it more accurately, the basin of water mentioned earlier, there was this bubbly blond young house sparrow effusively enjoying her bath. The sparrow, with its ruffled feathers that made it look round and cuddly, would repeatedly splash its wings in the water and then proceed to flutter them in the air, sending off a spray that sparkled like glass beads in the midday sun.

The sparrow was taking its time and repeated the procedure again and again. What surprised me was the solemn patience with which a bulbul stood waiting for the silly young thing to finish its bath so that it could quench its thirst. On seeing this I

reminded myself how individual perceptions can be misleading.

A poet has opined that crows will not be white. But talking of crows and the colour white brings to mind the baglas or herons that have taken to our plains. In the old days they were few in number. A white bagla standing at ease in a paddy field animates the field. Paddy has a more vibrant green in comparison with the sedate green of a wheat field. I can, however, never forget the lush wheat fields that I sighted while travelling on a bumpy road to Bamayan in the early 1970s.

The road to Bamayan abruptly turns left from the deep blue metalled road leading from Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif and Balkh. On the eastern flank of the road there was a stream trying to outpace us on our journey. An hour later we passed a row of blooming almond trees planted in a field beyond the stream. The almond blossoms were set off by an expanse of vivid green wheat. I have ever since cherished a similar sight on the silk surface of my memory.

In the old days people said that *baglas* were *manhoos* (bad omen) and would not allow them to nest near their homes. *Baglas* had to find some desolate place to nest and breed. Now, the baglas have abandoned their wetlands and taken to nesting on bleak black acacia trees that usually line the highways leading to towns. Near Begpur where we turn west to our village from the main road, I noticed that all branches that could withstand the weight of nesting

had been taken. The great many baglas on trees outnumbered the ones needed to care for the eggs and hatched chicks.

The *bagla* colony - everyone has a colony these days - seemed as busy and preoccupied with itself as Begpur Township. The most offensive attribute of the baglas is that their droppings are white and not brown as is the case with crows. The trees on which they nest or reside at night and the space under the vicinity resembles a newly white washed room with paint splashed all over the floor, the doors, windows and the bolts, handles and glass panes. Our house painters insist on being equally messy. The *baglas* are similarly inclined. The 'Sea of Araby' cannot wash the bloody white mess they make.

It is a mystery why *baglas* have to expel white excreta and splash it around blatantly. Most other birds do it discreetly, except the crows that can actually aim their droppings at people in their range of fire. Some people are of the view that bird shit ultimately brings good luck; rather be blessed by being stung by a honey bee, or better if a butterfly were to come and sit on the collar.

(12 Oct. 2005)

The Afghanistan I Saw

In 1968 it only cost ten rupees to reach Kabul on a bus from Peshawar. Kabul incidentally is shorter distance from Lahore than travelling to Karachi. A special bus had been engaged to take a busload of students of National College of Arts on a study tour, which cost us even less. Going up and down the Khyber Pass, across the flat stretch through Jalalabad, over the Hindukush Mountains into the Kabul valley was both tiring and an exhilarating experience. From Lahore we took the train to Peshawar. In Kabul thanks to one of our Afghan students we were able to make a good deal for a stay in a clean hotel. While I, as the delegation leader kept spirits up and curiosity alive, all small matters concerning food, transport, boarding, lodging and maintenance of account etcetera, etcetera were left to Professor Khalid Anis and his student confidants. Yousaf, a tall, fair and handsome orderly of the college Principal, often mistaken by visitors at the college for being the Principal himself, was actually in real charge. He advised what was best for us to do and we readily agreed. He was proud to have served with English Principals. He was proper and never said in so

many words but considered working for indigenous Shakir Ali bit of a come down.

For the next few days we rested in Kabul, strolling dusty roads shopping, and after dusk visiting open air cinemas to entertain ourselves on Indian films that were banned in our own country. Finally, we set forth for Bamiyan, Mazar e Sharif and Balkh, on a black metalled road built by the Soviets. It was without doubt and paralleled one of the most memorable journeys of my life. Once we crossed the Sarang tunnel, which connects Kabul to the Northern Afghanistan, we approached the Central Asian Steppes, an endless expanse of thick green turf carpeting the entire prospect without a tree as far as the eyes could reach. I wondered how many armies must have swept through these hills on their way to Isphahan, Baghdad and Istanbul. I wondered how many brave and treacherous warriors had been swept under this rich turf. There are so many small inert undulations on the slopes and the valleys that one really could not conjecture, what or who lay under the thick coverlet. While lost in reverie, vainly speculating about obscure truths, a herd of wild horses with flying manes swept into view. I could not have imagined the mutability of rich moments and the inevitability of eternal time could have been demonstrated with greater truth? The Steppes have seen all. How many armies need further scar them? When will the gods cry out, 'Hold enough', I wondered?

In order to go to Bamiyan, our bus steered off to the left on a dusty road. The road to Bamiyan meanders along a cheerful emerald stream. The wheat crop was just ankle deep, providing the right contrast to set off the almond blossoms, which have not dimmed in my memory to this day. At Bamiyan we checked in a hotel built on a flat broad hill in the centre of the valley. The two statues of Lord Buddha, one smaller than the other, have been carved out of live rock and are almost as tall as the cliff itself. The Bamiyan valley, like a huge bowl, is peaceful and quieter than the Courtyard of Lions at the Alhamra palace. The Presence of Lord Buddha adds a divine dimension, which makes it also sublime. There were rough stairs hewn out of rock, which led visitors to the very crown of Buddha's head, which was so big that huddled together we had a photograph taken of us.

The upper part of the niche that surrounds the Divine Head was decorated with frescoes. These faded frescoes depicted human forms with flying draperies, closer in tradition to Chinese art. At the entrance to the Bamiyan valley, if one crosses the stream and climbs up the hill, there is a monument in ruin, which I learnt later, has much more elaborate and better-preserved Buddhist frescoes. I can only hope that a believer of recent times hasn't accidentally wandered up there looking for a stray goat.

The Afghanistan I remember was a country where things seem to have stood still. A person could travel a hundred or a thousand years backward

without having to stress his fancy. During our journeys, sight of a glistening jet plane defining its trajectory with a stream of white cloud against a sharp blue sky was the only occasion the senses were briefly pricked to the present tense. Afghanistan had great ethnic, scenic and cultural diversity. It also had streams of cascading colours ranging from turquoise to rust. Above all it was a country at peace with itself. The Tajiks, the Uzbeks, the Pakhtuns, the Shias and the Sunnis intermingled and lived in harmony. Looking back at Afghanistan, its proud mountains, quiet valleys and leisurely pace of life, one can only choke over old memories.

Mazar e Shareef which was to be our next stop is famous for having the Mazar of Hazrat Ali. The local Sunnis insist that Hazrat Ali is actually buried there and not at Najaf. At the shrine I was a bit intrigued to come across a man holding a blind man with a rope tied to his neck leading him like a meek animal around the shrine in circles. When I enquired of someone why the man was acting in this strange manner, I was informed that the blind man was pleading with abject humility to have his sight restored. I was confided that a number of people had regained their eyesight in the past by following the similar practice.

Balkh is about twenty kilometres from Mazar e Shareef and about ten kilometres short of the former Soviet border. The fertile valley of Balkh is nourished by a natural spring. The Tartars destroyed the city; most of it now lies buried in permanent ruin. Our local

guide proudly asserted that it was amongst the most ancient cities of the world. Balkh also takes pride in having an exquisite mosque embellished with glazed tiles and an abode of spotless white pigeons. There was not even one bird I saw with a blemish. The place was blooming with Irises. The Iris that is so hard to grow here flourishes like our *gairda* there. The flowers bear blue, white and yellow blooms, with their petals the size of a young lady's palm. It was not the season for fruit, but I found the street carts loaded with lettuce, which pedestrians loved eating at all times of the day. The crisp and crunchy lettuce plant was always first immersed in a large terracotta pot and then handed over to the customer for a small coin. I discovered later that it was not a solution of vinegar in which I believed it was doused but plain water in order to rinse it. Personally, I would have liked to have my lettuce, after it had been rinsed, to be dipped in a light solution of vinegar and salt. The true Lahoris go a step further and prefer to have everything with that awful black salt. They find its sharp taste and rather offensive odour just the right thing to pep up the liver and tune the digestive system. The street vendors, without even asking, sprinkle its dark granules on all edible vegetables and fruit, ranging from carrots to pears to peaches, oranges, melons to guavas and apples, and even persimmons; fortunately, not bananas yet. There is no end to individual predilections but this is the limit. But like the citizens of Balkh, I prefer having my fruit just bathed in plain water and not sprinkled with chemicals. (22 April, 2003)

A Grumpy Heron and Inventive Hens

"It was after months of hard effort that Mo had finally succeeded in pressuring some of the compliant hens to lay cholesterol-free eggs."

It is a very muggy day. Not a leaf moves. I haven't heard even the flutter of a wing for hours. Earlier I saw a common heron getting terribly annoyed at a young *maina*. The *maina* had ventured too close for his liking. He ponderously stood ruminating on a ridge, in a paddy field. A heron, as you know, has a long slender neck. In this case, he sat with his neck pulled back, the head resting on his bulging chest.

It amazed me the alacrity with which he struck out with his beak, with feathers puffed up on his neck, to scare away the *maina*. As far as I could see, it was a gentle *maina*, but she was not scared. The *maina* meant no harm. She was cheerfully making a friendly call; the heron was being needlessly nasty.

The sprightly young bird with her large black eyes encircled by broad yellow loops reminded me of Egyptian frescoes where the royal ladies have their

eyelids painted in a somewhat similar manner with azure blue. The *maina* visibly felt hurt but instead of flying off, hopped away to the adjacent furrow, presumably to come back when he was in better temper. At this point I left and walked away to survey how the rice plants were doing in the adjacent acres.

Before the beginning of the current paddy season, these boggy fields were treated with a strong dose of sulphuric acid, which was preceded by green manure. The plants had taken a bold stand and stood evenly well-spaced. The prospect looked good and I was naturally pleased. Getting a high yield from fertile land is a profitable blessing but to shake a bad patch of land to life gives somewhat greater satisfaction. The Monsoons are quite fantastic. The way they transform a parched tawny prospect into a green vista of verdant galore is not short of the miraculous. This summer, the sun got more than usual incensed by its arrogance and there seemed no respite for paddy farmers. But at last cumulous clouds rose like mountains from the north, chased by ponderous rumblings of the dark nimbus, bursting into sheets of rain. A burgeoning green flooded every nook and crevice, even drowning bald patches. Barren roots stirred to life. Wild plants and bushes, grasses, flowers, and leaves are defined individually as if delineated with a calligrapher's reed and then threaded together into a tapestry.

An inimitable riot of green that is beyond a painter's palette, an unshackled cheer of foliage climbing up banks, coming down slopes, ascending

trunks of trees. There is a wild invasion of motley plants, herbs, vagabond shrubs and medley of green shades. There are of course snakes, mostly non-poisonous, but best left alone. In this weather, when it gets cruelly humid and hot they can become - like our friend the grumpy heron - a trifle odious and strike. It is best to be cautious and let them slither away to hunt for mice and frogs.

Someone asked, "Which is the best and the worst seasons of the year?" another instantly replied, "Monsoons, of course!" There can be nothing more oppressive than if the sun appears after a Monsoon shower. It gets steaming hot. But then what can compare when a muggy day is unexpectedly overcast, soon nippy breeze touches your damp neck and cheeks; moments later, the body cools and a cuckoo afar nestles in some tree calls.

A lover's heart longs. It is fabled that on a day like this Radha sure will come. What a season! The Monsoons are a gift for artists to relish sensuous images and for poets to smooch mangoes "sweet and in abundance". And here am I, bogged down in a paddy field in company of a grumpy heron. In the old days eating of mangoes was synonymous with the coming of the Monsoons. Those who eat mangoes before the first showers of rain are not considered men of taste. It is only after coming of the Monsoons that it's regarded proper to immerse mangoes in buckets of chilled water. Desi mangoes are demure and juicy, having them is fun. The best way to enjoy them is to

roll up the sleeves, and care not if the juice drips down the elbows while you suck one by one, till the bucket is empty. Similar latitude cannot be taken with the grafted varieties. Some people slice them, some peel and then dice them into cubes, and some serve them to guests with custard or cream; that I regard an insult to the king – the king of fruit.

A friend sent us a crate of mangoes the other day. These were actually from his orchard and not purchased from the market. In the end does it matter, as Ghalib might have quipped, where they come from, as long as they are sweet and come in crates? But what was wonderfully intriguing about them was the label, pasted on each fruit, that read, 'Sugar Free – Recommended for Diabetics'.

Last winter I received a crateful of eggs from Mian M Mo, the same friend, that were unusually large in size. I pitied the hens which made huge efforts in laying them. Next day when a few were cracked for breakfast, three yokes slipped out of the shell and sizzled in the pan.

Having three yokes for breakfast is a bit much, but my wife drew my attention to the label on each egg, which claimed in bright red letters that the eggs were Cholesterol Free. How is this possible I said in disbelief, so I rang up my friend, thanked him for the eggs and then added that he was really very funny? Mo was not amused and assured me that it was not at all funny. The eggs were, actually, cholesterol free and that it was after months of hard effort he had finally

succeeded in pressuring some of the compliant hens to lay them for him. Since then I have been wondering that if my friend Mo can achieve this with hens, who can restrain Gen Mu not to pressure some politicians to lay for him.

(19 August, 2003)

Khwaja's Melting Pot

A few days back I was in nostalgic rapture viewing a video CD loaned to me by a friend. It was a collection from golden times. When I saw Raj Kapoor and Nargis sing in pouring rain, I informed my mother that Raj Kapoor originally belonged to Lahore but later shifted to India. To her, over eighty years old, this was incomprehensible. 'Why did this *sohna munda* (handsome lad) leave his country?' she asked. I asked the same question from Sardar Mohan Singh's son. Jatinder Singh, affectionately called Jeeti, told me that at the time of Partition, they were away in the US but the family had no intention of moving from Pakistan to India. Once things had simmered down, Jeeti added, his father Sardar Mohan Singh intended to return to Rawalpindi. Incidentally, the house where they resided was taken over by the Pakistan army and designated as the Army House; later converted to the Presidency.

Sardar Mohan Singh was a man of taste and a covetous collector. His house was full of precious carpets and variety of antiques. Beside many other things, he had a unique collection of cigarette lighters, which in those days, according to Jeeti, was evaluated

at one million dollars. Jeeti confided this to me when in the eighties, he was here to attend the founder's day of Aitchison College. Naturally being in Lahore, he was keen to visit the place where he had spent his childhood. This was easily arranged and he was warmly welcomed and escorted around Rawalpindi, courtesy General Zia ul Haq! Zia never wasted a moment to make an impression on a visitor. Perhaps that is why some were surprised at how Pakistanis could think ill of such a nice and amiable fellow. Jeeti returned from Rawalpindi emotionally hurt and injured person. He had gone to revive childhood memories, to be with the precious objects that had kept him company in his most impressionable years. It 'pained' him to find that most of the familiar companions were gone. Were they kidnapped by thieves or pilfered by the later residents over the years is anybody's guess. Surely, someone must have made a list of things when the house was taken into custody by the army. If it can be known that Henry VIII had among his belongings a pair of football shoes, should we not try to learn where Sardar Mohan Singh's precious belongings have gone?

The courtesy extended to Jeeti, when he came to Pakistan as an Indian citizen, was definitely VVIP. But what is important to record is the categorical, "No!" to his father when he tried to return to Rawalpindi from the US. Sikhs should proceed to India, he was told. By that time the founder of the nation had been buried. Jinnah himself had a different vision of Partition. He never for a moment believed, that the two parts would

not live in friendship. Nehru had established a secular vision of India without paying much heed to allaying the fears of a considerable Muslim minority in the presence of an awesome Hindu majority. Jinnah also aspired to establish a secular Pakistan. His concerns are passionately envisaged and spelt out in his inaugural speech to Pakistan's first constituent assembly. Unfortunately, the secular visions of both the countries were tarnished and distorted by the Hindu nationalists in India and the military-mullah mooching in Pakistan.

All nationalist movements are by their very nature exclusivist. In its initial phase it was not visualised that the exclusivity of Indian nationalism, which was supported by Iqbal as well as Jinnah, would ultimately transform into Hindu nationalism – the insistence on India's great Vedic heritage, revival of ancient legends and myths and its arts and culture to the exclusion of the achievements of other traditions, which had given to India its great diversity and the attendant sensibility.

Nationalist movements, especially in multi-racial, lingual and religious countries must inevitably lead to divide people who are living in harmony. In recent times, Yugoslavia is a terrible example of the disease. In the past if German nationalism helped to unite the Germanic states into a single entity, it also laid down the foundation for Nazi fascism. If there had been no nationalist upsurge, the history of Europe may have been less painful.

Nationalism can strengthen a people's resolve to combat aggression but it can also easily morph into self-deceptions and prejudices. A country, while defending its interests and values, need not become exclusive and majoritarian. To fight imperialism today, a unity of the people of the world can only be forged in its widest diversity.

Nationalism and ideology, when they become an exclusive reserve, are like a room without windows where the inhabitants ultimately have only the freedom to 'choke themselves to death.' It can then become a tool of isolating and repressing the citizens of the very country it espouses to defend.

On one of my jaunts with my late friend Sohail in 1968, while we were passing through Ajmer, the *urs* of Khwaja Moyeen-ud-Din Chishti was in full swing. We were getting late for Jaipur, where we were to spend the night, but we instantly stopped. Although dishevelled and inappropriately attired, my wife in a safari suit, we couldn't possibly drive off without paying our respects to the great saint. At the entrance to the mazar was an ornate door, intricately dressed in gold and silver – a gift of a Rajput Maharaja. I was a bit taken aback when a moment later I spotted some devotees dressed in a single long saffron cloth, enter the precincts and proceed to pray at the shrine. They were Hindus. It appeared that the Khwaja welcomed all who came in peace.

There were two big *degs* (cooking pots) in the courtyard. One was really gargantuan, its mouth could only be reached by a ladder, the second *deg* was

smaller that required a shorter ladder. The *degs* eagerly received whatever a devotee fed to them, blending everything to perfection. There was a continuous supply of platefuls of *Bhandara*, for anyone who asked for it, but all had to wait their turn in a long, winding queue. What a saint! A saint of everyone, whether you were apparelled in green, saffron or red, wore a turban, a cap or prized a *tilak* on a shaven forehead.

It was getting a bit late on our way out of Jaipur. The sun had set. The *Maghrib* prayers were just over, but my friend Sohail insisted that we stop and walk down the flight of stairs leading to a small mosque peacefully hidden behind a few acacia trees, adjacent to the road on the right. But before we could descend the flight of stairs leading to the mosque, Sohail accosted a rather handsome six or seven years old Hindu child, who was passing that way. He affectionately encouraged the lad into small talk and then at one point casually asked the little fellow what he thought of the Muslims. The Hindu child, the little innocent darling that he was, came to a standstill and replied with dilated eyes, "*Mian baray larakay hein.*" On a small matter they take out a knife and say, "*chakoo ghomp doon ga.*"

The point is not who is more aggressive. I am sure a child in Gujarat and Kashmir has a different view. The issue is that should we adults not, wherever we are, whoever we are, try to alter the perception of our children. A spoonful of *Bhandara* from Khawaja's *deg* would certainly help. (24 Feb. 2004)

To *Thal* with Friends

My friend Humayun was required to visit and inspect a piece of agricultural land in Thal allotted to one of the family elders in the fifties. Since I have been casually associated with a bit of farming I was asked by my friend to accompany him on the trip.

It was planned that we stay the night at Trimmu Irrigation Rest House and proceed to our destination the following morning. The Trimmu Head works are located beyond the confluence of Jehlum and Chenab about an hour's drive from Jhang. We left Lahore on a Wednesday at about quarter to one. Logistically it was not a bright thing to do, because it was a little early for lunch and trifle late to have it on reaching the next convenient stop. The delay in our departure was actually no one's fault. We couldn't possibly commence our journey without having our booking for the night at Trimmu, confirmed. We were of course repeatedly assured by a retired but influential friend who was managing the booking, that we had nothing to fear as ninety five percent of it should be considered done. I was adamant that I was not stirring out of my house because ninety five percent of my worries in life

were always caused by the unaccounted five percent, which in this case accounted for our late departure.

Luckily Sheikh sahib - Humayun my friend - had wisely had few parathas and shamis packed for the journey. These came to our rescue when the car broke down a few kilometers short of our point of exit from the Motorway. It took almost an hour for the car engine to cool down. The moment the radiator stopped coughing steam, it was replenished with three large bottles of mineral water and we, with some tribulations, drove on towards the exit leading to the town of Pindi Bhattian. Apparently one of the rubber tubes had leaked, causing the engine to heat up and burn the gas kit or is it the gasket; whatever it is.

While a mechanic and his team of young apprentices probed the engine - under, over, in and around - Sheikh sahib and I sauntered around the bazaars surveying the local scene. Fortunately, since it rained the day before, anxious vehicles were unable to raise clouds of dust that storm humans and foodstuff hawked by vendors. To pass time I purchased a quarter kg of peanuts and advised my friend, who is in a perpetual state of anxiety to stop prancing up and down the streets? I persuaded him to sit down on a stray wooden bench lodged between several vendor trolleys and view the moving pageant of life in style and comfort. To which he agreed. The peanuts were not as good as I had thought. A lesser, scorched and shriveled variety had been mixed with the better-quality nuts I had inspected. Obviously, some monkey

business had taken place in the bag. I saw a vendor walk his cycle with a basket of delicious looking *bairs* - not the round but the oblong ones - but felt reluctant to hail him in the crowded street. The *rehris* (trolleys) and shops were full of deep orange kinnoos. The small ones which had dropped off the tree on their own, called *keras*, were being sold for ten rupees a dozen. The big sweet ones spreading at their bellies were priced at five rupees for a single fruit. One could surely haggle for a dozen. The kinnoos, because of their demand in the Gulf States in the last few years have become expensive. At one time Iran was our chief importer of oranges. I wonder considering our soured relations with the country these days, if kinnoos are being imported by Tehran. It is about time that we repaired our fences with our old friend and steadfast neighbour.

Humayun in the meanwhile, quietly arranged an alternative transport vehicle. As soon as it arrived, we merrily resumed our journey, no longer tense but sated with the memory of motley images of jaunty colours, blended odours and blaring but happy sounds of the bazaar from which we had sped away with great relief. Meanwhile the sun had sneakily descended from behind a placid grey stratum of clouds, which stretched across the horizon. Lively green prospects were with unexpected haste plunged into darkness. After a while when Sheikh sahib rolled down his window to have a puff, the fresh night air was nippy and bracing and unusually wet for that time of the year.

Humayun made good speed and adroitly managed to weave his way through dark passages between overloaded trucks and tractor trolleys, without taillights - one didn't know whether they were coming or going. Soon we realised that we would be late for Trimmu to order dinner. Humayun who was by now feeling a little peckish smacked his lips, instantly agreeing to the suggestion and that it would indeed be an excellent idea to halt at Jhang and pick up some food. On entering Jhang, we discovered that the town had been without electricity the whole day. Fortunately, some shops had their private generators working.

We tore into succulent chicken tikkas, while we waited for other items of food being cooked for our dinner at Trimmu. While at it, I probed into a seekh kebab, which was being done. The best way to have a seekh kebab is to pick parts of it off the skewer with your fingers when it's sizzling hot, just off the pit. And this is precisely what I did, burning my fingers in the process. This strangely reminded me of the Fifties and the great Khalifa and his proverbial kebabs. Khalifa sold only the seekh kebabs from a small shop beyond Wazir Khan's mosque on the street leading to Ganda Engine. He was the only one of his kind in those days. If I am not mistaken, the tikka shops at Gwalmandi started their business much later. The best kebabs were supposed to be crisp and expected to fall off the seekh with one shake of the wrist, not like the ones fabricated today, which cannot be diced even with a knife. Khalifa's kebabs were absolutely superb, though

a bit hot for people not accustomed to sharp chillies. A bowl of yoghurt from the adjacent shop always helped to cool down the ignited palettes.

Humayun loves to advertise a Spartan outlook and make friends laugh at the astute ways of the Chanioti Sheikhs. There was time when a friend spread the rumour that Humayun was a direct descendant of one of Emperor Akbar's Nine Jewels, the great Todar Mall but that is not true. Todar Mall did not hail from Chaniot.

Humayun, quite contrary to the sheikh tradition, is generous. In reality he possesses an insatiable capacity to over indulge himself. He likes advising his friends to be moderate and self-restrained, but if Sheikh sahib were thirsty, he would empty a well and when hungry would nibble across a table stacked with food, sampling dishes picking the tastiest bits. Since on this occasion he had built up only a small appetite, he placed order for only one mutton karahi, one kg deep-fried fish, and two large helpings of daal mash and aloo matar ki sabzi. A bit excessive for the two of us and the driver, I thought. Later I discovered that this was not all and that additionally one chicken karahi and dozen shami kebabs and a dozen naan had also been packed for good measure. On arriving at Trimmu, after the rest house staff had handled our luggage, the affable head bearer deferentially walked up and informed that the dinner was cooked, when would we like to have it served.

(11 March, 2003)

A Spirit Which Must Not Die

"Can man ever regain his lost heaven on earth? Marx unequivocally asserts that yes, he can, and rejoins that in any case, in making the effort, man has nothing to lose but his chains. Today, men scoff at all this as clichés, but there was a time when it warmed the hearts of millions. Today, belief in an ideology is like having lice in the head."

Planting a tree, painting, writing or even mending a broken fence can be spiritually cleansing. Charity, as opposed to sharing, is based on self-deception – seems as though a person is trying to make a deal with his lord, for a five-star board and lodging. Charity is investment in the future. Creative endeavour is an end in itself. Philanthropists are often smug, aglow with self-satisfaction. Most creative persons are angry and at odds with themselves. Inwardly challenged, each day they find the world and its values unbearable. A philanthropist is fortunate to have his conscience at rest and if ever anything ugly or unpalatable intrudes upon his sensibilities, he can readily suppress it by throwing a coin in its direction.

In their time all prophets spearheaded radical movements, in the philosophical as well as in the political sense, against tyrants and exploiters. The great religions, that were supposed to change the world, were soon transformed into reformist movements, which advocated charity and piety in the personal sphere, obedience and surrender in the social sphere. They sermonised about evils of drinking wine and fornication, but never once mentioned the wealth misappropriated from the labour of slaves and workers, which was the real cause of evil and decadence. The Holy Quran is quite explicit in stating that all great bounties of earth were created equally for all humans and not for any one person or class. When man lived as member of a group or a tribe gathering food and hunting wild animals, he was indeed free. He survived and developed because he shared whatever he hunted or gathered and believed in social togetherness. Subsequently, discovery of agriculture led to settlements and private ownership of land and property. This ushered in an era of human conflict, depriving him of his freedom and his heaven on earth. Altaf Javed (*Revolution of Mecca*) observes that the Koran explains this stage by narrating the story of Habeel (Abel) and Kabeel (Cane), two sons of Adam. In the story it is told that Kabeel, after murdering his brother Habeel, forcibly takes his wife and possessions. According to Altaf Javed, Habeel is the symbol of the early period of hunters because on his arrival at the place of sacrifice, Habeel comes with a camel or some other animal, Kabeel on the other

hand comes carrying seeds of grain. These grains were the symbols of the agrarian period, which marks the beginning of wheat cultivation. The murder of Habel thus marks the end of the hunters and beginning of Habel's era, based on private ownership of the means of production.

In the first phase, man conflicted with nature, in the second phase his principle adversary became man himself which persists to this day. The question is, can man ever regain his lost heaven on earth? Marx unequivocally asserts that yes, he can and rejoins that in any case; in making the effort, man has nothing to lose but his chains. Today men scoff at all this as clichés, but there was a time when it warmed the hearts of millions. Today, belief in an ideology is like having lice in the head. In fact, having a philosophical predilection, pledge to a cause, faith in ideas and dreams has all become suspect. Loyalty and love, which were once two of the Top Ten values, have been laughed out of court. Holding an opinion is considered as bad as expressing one. Ideologies build barriers and are divisive by their very nature. Let there be no separating walls so that ideas, nay capital, can flow across the world without hindrance or protest.

Upholding a value system where sharing and common human welfare is first, and personal profit third, is indeed an ideological issue. But logically speaking, and in all fairness, if profit was better shared, there would be no need for anyone to forge ideologies. In fact, there would be no need even for art

and literature, which tries to bridge the yawning gap between, "what is" and "what should be", between existence and fulfilment, between transient and transcendent.

There is a well-established pedigree of intellectuals and conservative mullahs who talk down to common humans from transcendental podiums. Both advocate that all worthy ideas descend from above. There cannot be anything more trivial and falsier than this. Aesthetic experience or conceptual ideas will never come to a person who sits in a well. Man has evolved not by passively speculating and deducing knowledge, but by gleaning it through perception and experience founded on interaction with life, nature and fellow humans. That is why the Quran has laid emphasis on knowledge by the "pen" based on experimentation and perception. I think what limits the creative potential of some artists and writers and the knowledge of our religious scholars is their denial of the endless source of inspiration, ideas and knowledge from life. Sophocles says, "Heaven never helps the men who will not act". In Urdu we say "*Himmat e mardan, maddad e khuda*".

Man has become man through his actions. Ironically, by becoming man he has also acquired consciousness, which has condemned him to make choices, forge ideologies; suffer pain and trials for commitment to others. The modern man is more than ever before, ripped apart by social and spiritual conflicts. Hamlet, who in a sense was one of the first

moderns after Oedipus, is a thinking person, but more than that, he reflects on his thoughts. So does Oedipus in a different context. Hamlet and Oedipus could both have kept their silence and lived happy, personal lives. But both had to do what had to be done. In the end their personal suffering seems small in comparison with their struggle to right the irrevocable wrong. Oedipus relentlessly investigates the past, which leads him to his own undoing. He blinds himself by gouging out his eyes and is not sorry for it. "What I have done here was best done – don't tell me otherwise, do not give me further council." Marcellus in Hamlet observes, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." Hamlet without hesitation states, "O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right." A spirit that condemns you to search for truth and accept responsibility against all odds must never be allowed to die.

(8 Feb. 2003)

Humans in Divine Scheme of Things

It is said that an empty mind is a devil's workshop. Let me tell you, first that it is not easy to empty the mind of all the rubbish stored in there at the behest of other people and second that unless the mind is emptied it will not seek new ideas. Most minds are so full that they seldom have space or leisure to seek acquaintance with new feelings and perceptions.

Evidently ideas treasured for years are also not easy to forsake, especially those that have proved profitable. Paradoxically it is even truer that sometimes people will not abandon traditional beliefs that are contrary to their own interest. Most poor people have been made to believe that they are poor because God has willed it so. They are inflicted with hunger because the fate lines etched into the palms of their hands are not right. The poor are persuaded to accept and bear their trials on earth with fortitude because they would abundantly make up for them in Heaven after their demise. For the time being they must agreeably agree to suffer the insufferable.

In the same vein poor countries that refuse to submit to the dominance of the rich and powerful states are coerced into believing that if they are patient, great benefits would "ultimately" accrue from their meek submission. In spite of the popular adage, I wonder if rape can be enjoyed.

Comprehension is a class phenomenon. A poor illiterate individual is likely to understand socialist ideas and concepts more easily than an educated wealthy one. The poor eagerly understand and endorse ideas based on concepts of togetherness and egalitarianism, insisting upon fair distribution of wealth. Most people from privileged classes are determined to spurn this as idealist nonsense by referring to the natural laws claiming survival of the fittest, forgetting that the best of humans aspire to live by ideas and not merely by senses and laws of the jungle.

There is another point about the jungle that needs to be remembered. When humans descended from the green canopy and stepped down on the dusty ground, they were the weakest of animals. With sabre-toothed tigers and other ferocious carnivorous beasts stalking the earth human survival has been none less than a miracle. One of the most important devices that enabled humans to survive was their ability to weld into groups that collectively hunted down animals that ran at great speed. Thus, did they also protect themselves against ferocious animals armed with powerful paws, sharp claws and tooth?

When I mentioned this to my young grandson Mustafa, he reminded me that there were many other animals like wolves – even lions – that hunt in packs. That is true, but there is a difference between the human group and the animal pack. When a pack animal gets badly wounded, it is abandoned – in some cases instantly devoured as nutritious food – by the pack without a thought.

In the case of humans, whenever a teammate gets hurt, he is not abandoned but nurtured back to health. When these groups developed into tribes, the more complex rights of a person and responsibilities of the individual to the tribe were established.

In the course of time as humans lived in harmony and watched over each other's safety and welfare, individuals were entrusted specific tasks and encouraged to develop talents to provide material comfort and strength to the human community. Humans evolved – through both collective effort and individual talent and not just through the survival of the fittest. Some arrogant humans who believe in their transcendental antecedents need to be reminded that their existence on earth so far has been a fraction of the lifetime that the dinosaurs lived on earth. Dinosaurs perished because individually and collectively they lacked the means to adjust to the earth's changing climate and planetary evolution.

Unfortunately, since humans have managed to create a culture and civilisation, they are so steeped in themselves and their material trappings they forget

that they too are animals. One of the questions that humans, in spite of their material advancement, must ask themselves is whether they will be able to survive even a quarter the time that the dinosaurs ruled the earth for? This seems doubtful but remains to be seen.

It is worth remembering that whereas the dinosaurs vanished because of their inability to adjust to their changing environment, there is danger that if and when the humans perish, it would be due entirely to their own conduct. It would be the result of their greed and hunger to exploit fellow humans and usurp what is not theirs.

A Rhesus monkey at Nathiagali with a matchbox is one thing but a man armed with nuclear devices is a nightmare. A fire can be smothered but a planet blasted into smithereens cannot be reassembled. That will be the day when the brief human history will end, replaced by blissful dark empty space. And yet some in our own country, who are uncertain about their next meal, are convinced that "atom bums" are essential for our security.

There are innumerable life forms, which perished during evolution. Life forms that were able to adjust to the changing environment and social circumstances have survived while others that could not have perished. This is a constant challenge not merely for animals but for humans. For human survival today, to upgrade material assets and advance technologies are not enough. It imperative we refine feelings and emotions, entering into

companionship with nature, incessantly establish more humane relations with other humans, harmony with nature and the world in which we live.

Can humans live up to these ideals? If not, they will surely perish. It will be tragic if cosmologist of an aesthetically advanced planet were to record, "Green planet earth, an important source of carbon dioxide came to a hasty end by exploding with a flash?"

Setting aside the much-taunted Story of Man, one of my learned friends based in Karachi informs me that we humans are very vain; in the larger divine cosmic scheme of things the real function of humans was to help convert oxygen into carbon dioxide.

(27 July, 2005)

A Crow on the Parapet

"There are people who suffer from all possible ailments ranging from gout to being irritable and grouchy. The fools will not learn and insist on what is right and how things should be done and run. They will demand their rights and will neither accept nor extend a favour. Citizens with a manifesto like this have a sad future."

The crow in our folklore does not have the negative sentiments that are associated with the raven in the west. A crow cawing repeatedly while perched on a parapet is taken to be announcing the arrival of a *mehman* (guest). Often, the lady of the house is not pleased at the thought of a guest. For her it means extra expense and the bother of additional work. When a crow goes *kaan kaan*, therefore, most housewives shout back *dafa dafa* (be gone, be gone). Says my mother: *azmayee gal aye, kaan bole te mehman zaroor anda aye*. (It is a time- tested thing; if the crow caws, a guest will come).

Young women with husbands or lovers abroad experience an irrepressible joy at the call of the crow. At one time, the crow was actually considered a part

of the household. It is not an alien to domestic life, like the raven nor is its *kaan kaan* regarded a bad omen – unless, of course, the woman of the house is a poor sport about uninvited visitors.

Another endearing character of the crow is its sense of commitment to the community, something we humans could learn from the bird. Whenever a crow stumbles upon some scrap of food, he makes a raucous din to draw the attention of his companions, summoning them to come and have their share. There was a time we, too, were better mannered. Before breaking bread, a person would ask others around to join him in whatever he was going to have for a meal and he thanked the Lord if anyone did join him. It is said that God lends *barkat* to a person's reserve of grain if food is shared.

A person who “ne’er shook hands nor bade farewell”, to use Shakespeare’s words, “but like a valour’s minion carves out his passage, till he faces the food laden table” and assaults it from the “nave to the chops” is a sorry sight. This is how many partake of their share of food at marriage feasts and public functions. Admittedly, some have a large appetite but they need not proceed with such “disdain” to others’ fortune.

In the Himalayas and its foothills people are stirred at daybreak by croaking of ravens. Unlike our crows in the plains that are grey around the neck and chest, the raven or the *Dhodai Kaan*, as we call it, is dressed in glossy black. When a raven strays into the

plains it is a source of unusual interest. Raven is not a social bird and likes to keep aloof from the companionship of boisterous humans. The shrill croaking of our crows can be annoying to those who like their nap or don't have a dear one gone abroad. Those who like jazz songs rather like the raven's hoarse voice. Perched on a sweeping branch of deodar or upper reaches of an elegant portal or a majestic chestnut, its deep resounding cawing diffuses into the entire valley. In a state of slumber in the hills, I always experience a tremendous sense of well-being in the morning, when distant cawing of the raven leisurely reaches my ears. I savour the moment and try to assure myself that it will linger on forever. "Please be up! Breakfast is on the table. It is too late to be still sleeping." I am thus brought back to the petty pace reality of everyday existence.

There is so much to do in a day. In the end in spite of best efforts hardly anything gets done. One has to go back to places and look over and over again into fixed faces resembling gothic gargoyles before ice is broken. The effort is exhausting and humiliating. A *Dhodak Kaan* definitely leads a pleasanter life leisurely gliding from tree to tree, flapping its wings from glade to glade.

T.S. Elliot measured some people's life by coffee spoons. It would be more appropriate and accurate for us to measure waste by the number of visits to government offices. There are people who have a much longer life than others. They have neither an

unhealthy blood pressure nor diabetes. They don't even die of cancer. These are the ones who make the fewest visits to the government offices. They know how to get the jobs done. There are others who suffer from all possible ailments ranging from gout to being irritable and grouchy. The fools will not learn and insist on what is right and how things should be done and run. They will demand their rights and will neither accept nor extend a favour. Citizens with a manifesto like this have a sad future. They say a person who cannot oblige others is of no use, either to himself or anyone else.

There were these members of a family who called on someone of their *baradari* and asked him to do a favour. The officer politely enquired if what they asked of him was *Jaez* (fair). The old fellow with a big nose who seemed to head the delegation retorted, "If the task was *Jaez* why would we come to you?" The real demonstration of authority lies not in following the dotted line of law but in finding means to bypass it. The really powerful sons of the martial soil must demonstrate courage to spurn the law and not be slaves to it. The laws are made for the weak and the inconsequential; the people who have a poor bloodline, an empty pocket, who ride old vehicles with civilian number plates.

There was a time a person felt proud of being a Pakistani. Can a citizen today have the same sentiments when he is increasingly made to feel less equal than others. How could one feel an Egyptian,

when in the day he was made to work at the pyramids and at night fed on onions, bread and tepid beer, before being flogged to bed? Fortunately, we are not slaves and this country belongs to us, and not the pharaohs. But freedom and democracy is, not something to ask for, but to experience and exercise. Some people will not feel enslaved in a cage; others may be free and yet chained by their own avarice.

Crows have become sparse in our burgeoning towns. Perhaps because our feelings are ravaged with trivial pursuits and we have no longings pricking our memory for absence of those we cherish or love. Moreover, everyone is a tinkle away. Even our forsaken heroine doesn't have to solicit the assistance of a pigeon to reach a lover with her tale of woe:

*"Wasta ay rab da toon jaween way kabootra,
Chithe mairay dhol noon puchain wey kabootra."*

I believe the role of a crow in the traditional folklore was more than that of a messenger. He was also a companion to the languishing lady in whom she could confide. She could also send him on an errand:

*Kaga rey, jaa rey, jaa rey,
Ppiya ko sandesa mora kahyo ja*

Personally, I would rather not beg a *kaga* (crow) to take a message, especially to Islamabad for fear of its being shot down.

(14 July, 2004)

The Larger Picture

The old must inevitably make way for the new. But is it needed that in the process of creating space for new things, past is randomly brushed aside? The new can be better secured if built on the firm plinth of the time-tested. Life and death, the process of coming into being and retreating is a continuous process of existence. New buds that raise their head and leaves that uncurl in spring would not be if the trunk of tree – and branches – were not tempered by all seasons. But sooner or later all must perish; a banal truth and yet sadness grips the heart even at loss of familiar objects.

This morning while a car was overtaking mine on Zafar Ali Road, I saw with a shock the familiar pair of *Gull e Mohar* trees brazenly shorn off their limbs. Where for decades these trees had stood gloriously – without doubt the oldest of their kind in Lahore – now stood two petrified grotesque torsos of bleeding wood bearing their pain in chilling silence. They and their dismembered remains have since then been cleared away by determined men. Soon their memory will fade away from our mind and we will get back to our urgent chores – but what a loss. This April there will

be no spring on Zafar Ali Road and no one to lighten our burdened hearts with the cheerful radiance of their blossoms.

Obviously, the owners of the property were compelled by urgent necessity to remove the pair of ancient trees that had been there decades before Gulberg was built. There are sometimes compunctions that cannot be set aside but what disturbed me was the wanton manner they were disposed of. Could the old companions have been saved if the owner had tried to incorporate them with the incumbent needs? It may be recalled that at one time the Free Masons' Hall and the Tollington Market were both being pulled down. They were saved in the nick of time by the intervention of concerned citizens. That the Masonic Hall, which was to become the Punjab Crafts Museums, was later taken over by the Punjab Chief Minister is another matter. The great crafts' tradition of the Punjab can at least be made to wait. Sooner or later, I am confident; the citizens will get the premises vacated and the building that was restored at considerable public cost is turned into the museum for which it was intended.

Some people who have a wandering mind constantly ask, "What did you say?" It is a rude and irritating habit. But there is more to life than focusing on the moment. A moment can be the foundation, of what can be, of gains, of dreams. But life is more complex and diverse in its unending possibilities than the sum total of moments. A fortnight back I felt the

instant need to recuperate by getting away from the fatigue of moment-to-moment living. Long views of distant prospects can be exhilarating. They can also help one see human vanity in its right perspective. It so happened that my friend Aseff was also feeling a bit roughed up by the constant demands of his constituents. So, we repaired to our common friend Shahnawaz Khan's farm at Jalpana situated between river Jhelum and the Salt Range.

Seeing our brown mood at our arrival - an hour after dusk - Shahnawaz wasted no time ironing out the creases with his warmth and usual conviviality. Shahnawaz has a way of infecting others with his genial personality. His lively conversation kept us in good humour till after midnight. Next morning, after a sizeable breakfast - of freshly-laid eggs by obliging farm hens, fried in butter and served with crisp *parathas* of sizeable thickness - we realised we had run out of conversation (an unlikely incident); acute crises resolved by Shahnawaz who informed us that we were off to survey the Salt Range. The first day we coursed through the Soan valley and the glens and glades adjacent to it. It was disturbing to see that mountain springs were drying out due to lack of rain for the past many years. The farmers who traditionally relied on seasonal rain and spring water irrigation have taken to boring tube wells. This does not auger well. We drove up to Sakesar, the highest point in the Salt Range, and had our lunch at the civil rest house that has a splendid view of the Uchali Lake. To my disappointment we could not spot a single waterfowl

on the glistening surface of the lake that has shrunk to about half its original size.

In the evening, we returned to Jalpana. The next morning, taking another route, we drove further down the Salt Range. We were determined to reach Kallar Kahar and have our lunch among the wild peacocks around the rest house perched on the hill close to Takht e Babur. The great Mughal emperor Babur had rested here for a while before venturing on towards Delhi. We noticed that the surface of Babur's *takht* (throne), a red sandstone slab, has been polished presumably to make it more comfortable for Babur to sit on when next time he is around. Babur is believed to have planted a pomegranate orchard during his sojourn at Kallar Kahar. It is now called the Safa garden. According to the information listed on a board at the entrance that leads to the Rest House through the garden, it now has only 500 pomegranate plants. There were also 1,000 Loquats in fruit at this time of the year. The other fruiting trees and plants have a count of 85 pears, 12 plums, 11 guavas, 10 *shahtoots* (long mulberry), two *jamans* and one *chakotra* (a grapefruit variety). We pleaded to the gardeners that for the sake of companionship they should consider planting at least one more *chakotra*.

It is ironic that in spite of the pride taken in providing this information to the visitors, no one is permitted to enter the Safa garden or walk to the Civil Rest House without prior written permission of the authorities that reside at an unknown place

elsewhere. A sizeable iron gate has been installed some distance up the road to ensure that anyone who has slipped through the first entrance can be apprehended before reaching the rest house. When we drove up into the compound to have our picnic lunch, we discovered that there was not a soul there.

The Kallar Kahar rest house has a spectacular view of the Uchali Lake and the hills beyond the motorway that lead on to Kuttas and Choa Saiden Shah. Why is the newly built and furnished rest house empty? The place can make money rather than losing it as it does now, retained for officials. Sardar Aseff, never short of wise digs, impassively listened to my bickering about the irrationality of guards stopping gentle visitors from proceeding to the Rest House. After a while when I had exhausted myself, he calmly cleared his throat and then facing Shahnawaz Khan observed, "The trouble with Mian Ijaz is that after all these years he persists in believing that the state of Pakistan is for the common people."

(13 April, 2005)

Memories of Another Time

"Ghannia must have realised that he had achieved his best, there was nothing more to be done. He had no desire to perpetuate himself by even opening a proper restaurant. And like an artist, he chopped and fried the inner layer of the last onion of his life and melted away into another dimension like a slab of butter on a hot platter."

The Indian coral tree is showing off its raving red blossoms these days. The blooming coral has been quite a favourite with many of our painters. Even Khalid Iqbal who finds considerable empathy with the dark demeanour of the acacia has not been able to ignore the coral's haughty spring presence. Personally, I find its red far too bright and overbearing. The *dhak* trees, only a few remaining in the city, have a much more interesting and random form and flowers in orange clusters. In appearance, the *dhak* is much more harmonised than the Coral, whose flowers seem stuck onto the branches.

I first saw the Indian Coral in March 1948. There is a handsome avenue beyond Aitchison College's mosque. The red flowers and the way they adorned

the tree's dangling branches dazzled me. The birds and bees loved flocking to it. It was without doubt one of the favourite haunts of Starlings, commonly called *Tillyars*. Perched on the coral tree, the relentless loud twitter of these migratory birds, believed to fly in from Japan, transformed it into a symphony of music and colour.

I believe the coral tree is also called *Kesu*, sometimes also *Gule Nishtar* (flower of arrows) because its flowers have pointed tubular petals resembling the fingers of the human hand. There is obviously a poetic twist in the name. The arrows are meant to draw blood. The coral or the *kesu* flower is associated with the hand of a beloved that has drawn blood from a loving heart. The really grand avenue of *Gule Nishtar* was on Davis Road. It stretched from the Mall to Simla Pahari, which deluded the Lahoris into believing that they were not far from the forested Himalayan slopes. Even when we took off on French leave (translate freedom leave), we would cycle around the Simla Hill at least once before proceeding onto Abbot Road, or Mcleod Road, to see a film or order platefuls of *Takka Tin*.

Takka Tin was Ghannia's innovation. Ghannia had his shop adjacent to the late Regent Cinema, opposite the Odeon. He sat perched on his feet like a bird on the footpath – except that there was no evidence of a footpath – before a considerable round platter on a stove, which he spasmodically stroked. He wielded a flat instrument in his hand, usually

employed by house painters to scrape off paint, which he deftly used to dice, slice, cut, scrape or admonish various ingredients and even whenever needed to scratch his back.

It was a culinary delight to watch Ghannia cook. He would throw two to four slabs of butter on the hot platter depending on the individual order and while the butter melted, he would hurriedly chop up an onion, roughly dice a root of ginger and cut a few green chillies, and allow them to sizzle in the butter. The required number of minuscule *kebabs* were then counted in lots of ten and smashed back into mince and mixed with the lightly fried greens. Ghannia at this stage became very alert and would continuously nudge and prod the mix, and as soon as he felt it was ready, would break open four eggs on top of it. A few more tosses and turns and the *Takka Tin* was ready and was neatly scraped off the platter on to a plate. There was a choice; you could either have plain hot *nans* or the soggy ones. Many preferred the soggy ones, which are steamed and fried in the leftover fat and spices on the platter.

We had a friend called Chozy, who had an incredible appetite. He could polish off four helpings of *Takka Tin* and order an additional side helping of six to eight eggs fried in slabs of butter. Have you ever tried six eggs fried in slabs of butter? If you have not, you haven't lived. Chozy was an amiable person but quite a character. He was known for his ample nose and off-spin bowling. He had an extremely deceptive

style. Even to this day the unfortunate batsman who got caught or were bowled out cannot say with any degree of certainty whether Chozy was a left or a right-armed bowler. Unlike our great Abdul Qadir, he never made the Test side because his nasal endowment would constantly get in his way.

Those days we rarely opted for the spicier concoction of chopped chops, and diced up kidneys and *kapooras*, which were sold in Ghannia's neighbourhood. Occasionally, when one felt strong in the stomach and weak in the head, we dared. Rasheed Toru, who was in constant trouble at school, could also be quite unpredictable. It baffles me to this day, why he, instead of asking *Pehlwan jee* for the usual plate of kidneys and *kapooras*, referred to the latter by its real name? Why not stick to the established innuendo? We were all astonished and embarrassed because Toru had addressed *Pehlwan jee* in a shrill high tenor. The obese mass of fair flesh that constituted the proprietor of the roadside establishment, who took orders while he cooked squatting under an old Banyan tree, remained visibly cool. He merely looked up in Toru's direction and pleaded, "*Baoo jee*, why are you bent upon ruining my business?"

We continued to visit Ghannia and *Pehlwan jee* for years before going abroad for 'higher studies'. I left for London to study art at St Martins, but returned with a degree in English from Cambridge. In our days in England, there was hardly anything available that could be legitimately called our own real cuisine. In an

evening, Latif Fancy, a school friend taught me how to make curry of sorts, which could either be had with a toast or a plain slice of bread. I liked the hard loaf ends for I found them the closest thing to our *roti*. The curry with slices of bread always reminded me of food prescribed by the doctor when a person was sick. Actually, with lots of chillies and big round Simla mirch and diced potatoes thrown in, it became quite nice. But one missed the *Roti*. In England I felt convinced that if other people could be persuaded to get hooked onto a *paratha* cooked in butter for breakfast, we could conquer the world.

On coming back home after an absence of more than three years, I was impelled to visit familiar haunts where I had spent a good part of my impressionable years. Top of the list was of course to tuck in a bit of *Takka Tin*. Ghannia was dead. He had died the previous year. Ghannia's lifelong associate and second in command was extremely competent but Ghannia was something else.

Ghannia must have made millions, which he squandered away on cards and betting on horses. In the field of culinary arts, Ghannia had created an original dish, which is today popular all over the city, but seldom replicated to the level of his excellence. A man of his talent was inevitably estranged from the times in which he lived. I believe in order to overcome the tedium of cooking every day of the year, he took to drugs. He must have realised that he had achieved his best, there was nothing more to be done. He had no

desire to perpetuate himself by even opening a proper restaurant. I believe he had an eye for his own sex but no other passion or attachment. And like the artist that he was, he chopped and fried the inner layer of the last onion of his life and melted away into another dimension like a slab of butter on a hot platter.

(6 May 2003)

Mickey Mouse and a Pile of Stones

Combing through the Internet to gather some information about the Hindu Shahi period, I came across three thought-provoking observations by archaeologist Bob Reis.

He refers to an article on looting of antiquities in the North Western Frontier Province and says large quantities of these have been taken away from the region for about 100 years. Today, he says, there is more stuff on the market than ever before. He adds, however, that in the world we live in such things happen.

Mr. Reis relates the story of an American Indian girl who found some pots in the desert and told her mother about them. The mother told her to just leave them where they were because they belonged to someone else (never mind if it was 1,000 years ago).

Mr Reis recounts the conduct of a man in South-West USA, who bulldozed an archaeological heritage site on his property on learning that Native American

parties and the US government were in litigation over the artefacts.

If people could be persuaded it would be best to follow the example of the American Indian mother who advised her daughter to leave the pots where they were because they were not hers. If a nation cannot save, salvage or restore its past, the least it can do is leave it as it is for the succeeding generations. This, of course, does not apply to the state of Pakistan, which does not believe in or care for history. Reis maintains that since treasure hunters cannot be stopped from digging and the farmers and land developers cannot help inadvertently finding things we should focus on the positive aspects of the illegal antiquities trade. So much, after all, has been collected and saved as result of it. If they are not adequately preserved, old objects - once they have been exposed - deteriorate in no time. The ancient cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro have been decaying ever since they were exhumed. Many archaeologists today feel that it was a folly to excavate the mounds at such an extensive scale without first undertaking the measures required to protect the sites from climatic effects.

As an aside I am reminded of the excavator who opened Tutankhamen's burial chamber. He found a peacock feather fan resting on the lid of the sarcophagus. He could not resist picking it up. Finding it lithe and alive as it must have been three thousand years ago, he gently swayed it to air his perspiring

face. It was not long before the royal fan disintegrated into dust. An eternity, it seemed, passed during the moment.

It is a strange feeling some people may experience on holding an ancient object in their hand. It connects them with the past. Three thousand years ago a person had placed a fan on top of the young Pharaoh's coffin; three thousand years later a person picked it up where it had been placed. How closer can one get to timelessness? On such occasions the distinction between centuries and seconds gets blurred.

But getting back to the issue of treasure looting and accidental finds, Reis asserts that archaeologists are thin on the ground and permanently underfunded. The stuff slips through their fingers. The "leave it alone" laws are un-enforceable. Museums and universities are bursting at the seams with un-catalogued and un-conserved stuff. At least, when it is brought to the market, he claims, it is taken care of rather than being recycled or thrown away. For decades, ancient monuments in and around Taxila have been destroyed for building stone. When they laid the railway line to Karachi, the British engineers used to crush the remains of Harappa and Mohenjodaro for use as ballast.

On April 2, this year - I remember it distinctly because I made a note of it - on reaching a place called Nurpur on our way to Kallar Kahar from Sakesar, my friend Shahnawaz Khan had the driver stop the car

and asked us to get off and walk across the metalled road to survey what appeared to be a half-dismantled old structure that stood in a graveyard. On close scrutiny I discovered that it was a small temple of the Hindu Shahi period. It is amazing how it has survived the ravages of time and our indifference. A faded notice of warning to intruders put up by the Archaeology Department on a rusting rod marked the site but there was no evidence of any further concern. (Actually, we were quite surprised to see that the Department had managed to claim the site with the small change that is annually doled out by the state after much persuasion.) The stone blocks from the dismembered parts of the little temple littered the graveyard. I was pleased to observe that there was a wild old *beri* tree protectively leaning over the remnants. Silently, but with a loud sense of guilt, I picked up from the debris a shard broken off from one of the stones. When the little temple is no more, I thought - since the state of Pakistan does not believe in history - we would at least have evidence that it once existed.

Soon I was to discover that my thoughts were no idle conceit. A few miles down the road we crossed a pile of stones that appeared to have been hurriedly collected over a grave. I was told that there stood another relic of the Hindu Shahi period, which had fallen in recent times. The remains had lain there for years but now some resourceful individual had carried off the stones in a truck - presumably for building purposes. There was as I mentioned only a

pile left. For a moment I thought of taking a piece - as I had done at Nurpur. But there were so few stones left that I thought it better to leave them there to keep the site alive for as many more years as possible. Even if a single stone left there can be a reminder of our cultural past. However, it is not an issue for the state of Pakistan.

A little further down the road, beyond the pile of stones we came upon a newly built school that had been freshly painted in white. The outer wall of the enclosure was proudly decorated with an image of Micky Mouse bidding young scholars to enter. I paused and pondered how the state of Pakistan could believe in Micky Mouse but not in our history.

(1 June 2005)

How Careless Can You Get?

Once a few of my friends and I took a trip to Kallar Kahar, which is now so conveniently located on the Motorway, barely three hours from Lahore. We drove from Lahore via Sargodha to Malakwal, where we stayed for the night at the Railway rest house. Next morning we got into a train and crossed the Jehlum River to Khewra, where the world's biggest salt mines are situated. There is no road bridge on the Jehlum at this point. At Khewra, we packed ourselves in a faded blue Ford, which surely must have seen better days speeding about in a metropolis. No one had even heard of Toyota or Mitsubishi vehicles in the years of its youth.

Slowly but surely, the Ford climbed the Salt Range with measured pace, in first gear. The driver would spasmodically rev up the engine when it came to negotiating a nasty ascent. While we anxiously watched our driver manoeuvre sharp loops, what do we see – a truck dangling from a precipice. Holding on by its back axle and wheels it reminded one of a trapeze artist in the circus. Our fears were somewhat allayed on observing that someone had taken the precaution of tying the truck bumper with a rope to a

gnarled limb of a tree dying near it. We wondered where the driver had gone. Was it likely that he had crawled up the truck which hung like a Chinese lantern? Several other such questions have remained unanswered to this day. The tremor of fear, which had crept up our spine, was happily gone almost as soon our brave automobile took the next turn. Once again, we became acutely aware of our own discomforts, huddled together like goats as we were. At Kallar Kahar we stayed in an old rest house built half way up the hill which peers down at the lake. Four centuries earlier Babur had arrived, thirsty and fatigued at this place, after traversing the rugged and dry Salt Range. He was so charmed that he decided to rest here for a while. During his brief sojourn he had a pomegranate orchard planted and a throne carved for him for use during the evenings when he pondered over the events of his life and what lay ahead of him in the plains that stretched before him. Babur's rustic throne and orchard survives even today. The orchard abounds in peacocks, but it is unlikely that Babur had brought the parents of these exotic South Asian peafowl from Kabul. The lake abounds with a variety of migrating waterfowls that find it a convenient resting- place, on their journey from Siberia in the north to south in winter and back from the south to Siberia in summer.

Flights of waterfowls sail in and fly out of the Lake, but the flamingos stay on for the whole season. When we arrived, there were more than two thousands of them flocked in the centre of the lake.

Next morning while we were basking in the winter sun, we enjoyed the sight of these big white birds with wings adorned with vermillion plumage. Flamingos have lanky coral red legs and a long neck, which can snake around in any direction. It has a specialised beak – with astonishing resemblance to Ramses II – for sifting food from shallow water. It certainly does not appear to be the easiest way to have your dinner but obviously the flamingos find it tastier having it this way.

We were so immersed in our thoughts that no one noticed a young lad, wielding a .22 rifle, come and take stand not far from us. Absorbed and enchanted with the unique experience of seeing flamingos in the wild, we didn't even see him raise the barrel of his gun, and without taking aim at anything in particular, fire a shot into the stationary host of white and pink. Almost instantly one of the flamingos dropped dead with an inaudible splash in the water where it stood.

I felt like throttling the perpetrator of the horrible act, but I resisted the temptation. It was no fault of him. The little rascal obviously a product of base upbringing was just showing off the gun gifted to him by his parents. His success conspicuously thrilled him. An uncouth domestic who accompanied him obsequiously gibbered something in praise of his master. How tragic, I thought that his parents should at his age, introduce him to the power of gun rather than to the power of ideas.

Isn't it appalling that any parent should initiate a child to violence rather than encourage him to be sensitive and be aware of Nature's beautiful manifestations? In all fairness, in today's world sensitivity is considered a weakness - a major weakness. At one time staring into the eyes of strangers was considered rude, pointing a finger at someone was just not done. Today pointing a gun is considered an admirable act of courage. After all, what is the choice for us; to get shot or learn to shoot the villain through his ugly mug? Violence begets violence, I know. Does that make choices any easier, would you say? I sometimes wonder if all the laudable social or moral values have been invented to bind the good and let the mean and the ugly go free.

I used to believe - and still do - that while everyone is involved in his or her own problems, there is a great joy in being involved in problems of others. We must learn to be happy in doing small things, caring for man and beast. You must not try to be always on the receiving end. There is great satisfaction in giving. It is good therapy to keep your mind at peace with itself and simultaneously also good for mankind. Those who are focused on their personal achievements alone, end up as losers. But how long will the gentle and sensitive allow themselves to be duped like this when they know that real virtue in our society lies in profit and amassment of property?

Therefore, let us not bleed over the trials of the sensitive, foolishly resentful of the rich and the

beautiful. Poverty is ugly and sinful, and the poor themselves should be held accountable for it. All is well in the World. What difference does it make if you kill a flamingo or shoot down a Palestinian youth armed with terracotta missile in his sling? In all fairness taking such decisions is not easy. Imagine what could happen while you idly lay basking in the sun and flamingos decide to invade our country. In Florida there are flamingos which are all red. Imagine how careless some will get?

(29 Nov. 2003)

Eaters of Their Own Dead

Travelling through the Salt Range an observer cannot escape the depressing feeling that the nectar, which sustained its dells and dales, lakes and valleys, is drying out. The bubbling springs that fed its ponds and pools are reduced to a trickle. The beds of perennial streams are dry. The lakes - once home to flamingos and some native and migratory ducks - have shrunk to half the size. Some of them have completely disappeared. Fodder and grain crops have encroached upon the dried beds of others.

I must say the people make the most of it even in adversity. We saw groups of young boys playing soccer and cricket on the flat, dry tracts from which the water had receded. The farming is now supported mostly by tube wells. It grieves my heart when I reflect on how long the subterranean water can be pumped to support agriculture.

Little can be done to avoid natural calamities. Man-made disasters can, however, be averted if humans learn to live in harmony with nature. The planet holds many bounties for humans but these are not endless and need to be used cautiously and

constantly replenished. It is said that even a well full of gold coins soon empties if left in wasteful hands. The earth has been so badly plundered and abused that every day it warms up in greater anger. This will have disastrous consequences for humanity regardless of colour, race or creed.

We must pause and think and not keep demanding more and more of her. A spoilt rich brat will mindlessly break toys as he believes they will be easily replaced. But our planet is not a toy. Any serious damage is caused to it is irreparable. There is limit to what it can heal. That is perhaps why God, while reminding humans of the endless bounties of the earth He has bestowed on them, repeatedly reprimand humans for spurning them. "How many bounties of thy God wilt thou deny." (*Sura Rahman* - The Quran).

Driving from Kallar Kahar to Katas and Choa Saidan Shah one passes through one of the finest Potohar valleys that can be imagined. An avenue of hills, sedately shaped and adorned with rich grasses, flank flat, verdant prospects. Only a decade ago one could hear a bee alighting on a wild flower - the sound of its wings cheerfully cutting through pristine air. On our recent journey we found the buzz of the bees and the fragrance deluged by the rattle of machines and dust. Satan was at work clearing the ground to placate the lust of greedy men, forever wanting more.

A tragedy, we learnt, is in the making. The beautiful valley will be raped and slaughtered and then its body will be left to fester. Giant cement

factories are being constructed in the reclusive valley that will devour the surrounding hills to make cement. The mineral needed for making cement can be excavated and transported without causing an ecological disaster and damage to our natural heritage but the factory barons are much too powerful to be dissuaded by a suppliant State.

It is a question of maximising your profits so why go the extra mile? If a person can without any qualm slay the mother and feed its flesh to his immediate barking greed, why pay the butcher? What are these men made of? Why can they never say enough? How many bounties of God will they deny themselves and us all?

For decades, the stone-crushing machines have been accomplishing an avaricious job of munching away at the Taxila valley. Hill after hill has disappeared but the appetite for crushing the national heritage has not abated. And no one cares. A cement factory sanctioned at Hasan Abdal, in spite of very loud protests by concerned citizens and legislators continues to supplement efforts of a hive of stone crushing machines. The cement dust that Fecto Cement factory has been spewing like a volcano over the town and its neighbourhood, any doctor will tell you, causes and aggravates asthma and other respiratory and skin diseases and eye problems. It has also rubbished appearance of the valley, which is the site of historic Mughal Gardens and sacred temples and relics associated with Guru Nanak. The crystal

river that once meandered through the verdant dale and historic town like a lariat of silver is so fouled that the great tiger fish Mahasher which lived in its cool, clear water has forever perished.

Mention must be made of another factory, Hasan Abdal Cement, that also contributes to our health and heritage. The factory is eating into the flanks of the rocky hill that is sacred to the Sikhs because an image of the palm of Guru Nanak's hand is imprinted on one of the rocks. Muslim devotees to a Saint who is buried up the peak also hold it in esteem. But these concerns do not matter as long as cement can be made, even from the sacred bones and precious memories of our ancestors. Add to these the Bestway and DG Khan Cement, the two monstrous enterprises, impatiently sharpening their teeth for the day when they will begin chewing the green hills of the Katas valley.

The three sites form a unique triangle of cultures and civilisations that represents the three great religions of this region. Taxila, Katas and the Panja Sahib are sacred to the Buddhists, the Hindus and the Sikhs. They are also part of our national heritage that sets the Muslims of Pakistan apart from the Arab, Berber, Turkic, Indonesian and Anglo Saxon Muslims. I should have hoped that the students and teachers of the well-known army school at Hasan Abdal had taken the matter in their hand for it was their more than our health and future at risk. It is never too late.

The readers may be better acquainted with Taxila and Panja Sahib than they are with Katas.

Before partition, the second largest Hindu festival in India used to be held at Katas. (The Kumbh festival in India is claimed to be the largest gathering of humans on earth.) Shahnawaz Khan Niazi informed me that when the first Indian parliament was elected, water from Katas was carried to New Delhi and served in bowls to the members of the parliament at its first convening.

Sardar Aseff Ahmed Ali, former Foreign Minister and our travelling companion, made a most pertinent suggestion. "Why can't we declare the three - the three great religious centres - as the three points of a Golden Triangle?" he said. What a splendid idea, we thought.

Instead of surrendering and allowing the sites to be destroyed for private profit we could preserve them and profit through good will tourism. Soon the Golden Triangle could become a symbol of our rich pluralist cultural heritage and an endless source of economic enrichment for the local population. Could there be a better way of projecting our better image while benefiting our citizens and bettering the Sites.

Things are easier said than done. Individual Capital and Corporate Will can be much stronger than a fragile State and corrupt governments, even when armed with nuclear devices.

(9 June 2005)

Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom

Last week I was in Islamabad at the invitation of Raja Changez Sultan, Director General of the Pakistan National Council of the Arts for a 'Dialogue on Art'. This is a programme organised by Gulzar Afaqi. They put a person in the dock and ask him to talk about his work and the field of his primary pursuit. Since painting is my passion, it was not easy to find words to describe my concerns – words are such harlots they refuse to keep your company when you most need them. But why complain; it is a private affair the less said the better. None said is best. The best I could do was to show the audience about thirty bad transparencies spanning a period of four decades. Some of the questions, which were posed to me later, helped me to discover insights into my own work. I regard social interaction pivotal to my nature and work.

A retired ambassador who works rather hard at his golf was practising at the range when Muneer, a club wit, shouted at him, "Excellency keep practising! You will definitely improve when you grow up!" Credit goes to him as he kept his cool and brushed off the

remark and continued driving with his trusted old wooden driver. The other day when our flight was waiting our turn to tee-off he walked up to me and pleasantly enquired, "Dear! How are you doing with your painting?" I couldn't think of anything better so I rather affectedly replied, "Painting is a passion with me. Today is the time of anger. Anger is precious so I try not to trivialise it." At which he asked another, "Dear! You express yourself so well but why can't you pursue better politics?" Evasively, I answered "In order to address this issue we must first have politics and not martial rule," I pleaded. He was not convinced. I feel considerably involved with the PNCA because I was one of the founding members of its governing body and a member of the National Committee, which formulated a cultural policy in the early seventies. The policy recognised the need to decentralise culture in order to end the hegemony of any single culture, language and literature. While Urdu remained the national language, the languages and cultures that were denigrated as provincial or regional were acknowledged as integral components of the national culture. The concept of unity in diversity replaced the monolithic assertion that viewed the medley of languages and cultures of various ethnic groups and nationalities residing in Pakistan as a divisive force. That cultural policy viewed erstwhile 'divisiveness' as diversity, which contrary to weakening lent strength and multiplicity to Pakistan culture.

The concept was based on the recognition of the unique and distinctive expressions of our people from rugged and forested mountain ranges, to green and fruity valleys; from the alluvial plains to settlements in the deserts to the banks of rivers and shores of the Arabian Sea. The cultural policy was based on a democratic and secular conception, where all citizens were equal and worthy. Historically, it conceived Pakistan as a rich repository of a melange of art and ideas of many races and civilisations. These traditions mingled with indigenous traditions to form a culture of great diversity and tolerance.

Sibte Hassan and Aitzaz Ahsan have described the process in a learned and engaging manner in their works, *Pakistan Mein Tehzeeb Ka Irtaqa* and *The Indus Saga*, respectively. It is so ironic that the forces, which have in the past tried to impose a static, monolithic concept of culture from above, are today either terribly divided or isolated. It is amazing that while regarding the Muslims of the world as one *Millat*, the various languages spoken in Pakistan were considered a threat to our nationhood. The attempt to confect a culture on a bias for one language and its affiliated traditions nurtured by the elite was treacherous, which as we now all know, had tragic consequences for Pakistan.

In reality the question of the 'National Language' was a political one. A hypocritical attitude was adopted for political and economic gains. If one looks at the question of language in class perspective there

are three striking aspects and groupings. First there are those who are Urdu speaking but English medium who would like their children to speak English, study in English schools and proceed to be educated in universities abroad.

Second are the Urdu Medium citizens who in spite of their best efforts miserably falter in acquiring English language and manners. And then there is the third group of illiterates who are deprived of even an elementary education. This vast majority of the poor, comprising the creative Sindhis, the valiant Baloch, the resourceful Pakhtuns, the hardy Punjabis, the urbane Urdu speaking and others of even greater talent, acquire a tongue and practical knowledge from their unlettered parents and trials of life. The sad and tragic process of the poor children growing up to adolescence is faithfully observed and described by Shaukat Sadiqui in his famous novel, *Khuda Ki Basti*. In reality the contradictions arising from linguistic policies are similar to the provincial and class contradictions, which have ravaged our beloved country. They all arise from the nature of economic contradictions.

Absolute truths are a matter of faith and cannot be resolved through debate and discussion, through give and take, through consensus or compromise. They are by their very nature mostly established through force. Fortunately for Ziaul Haq, General Sher Ali Khan had already fabricated the concept of Islamic Ideology during his stint as General Yahya's

information minister. Sher Khan buttressed the concept by the notion of 'Ideological Frontiers'. All dictators and their disciples have upheld this myth which has empowered the State to call every citizen's conscience and faith into question ever since. This was part of the strategy to suppress any social change. Anyone who spoke of peace and the rights of the provinces was declared an Indian agent, anyone who demanded economic and social rights for the people was a Soviet agent and anyone who spoke for the rights of women was a Zionist agent.

Being an American agent was kosher (*halal*). Most religious organisations were hand in glove with Zia in fighting for the United States of Islam against the infidel Soviet Union. What was being introduced was not Islam, but the violence of *Gali, Goli and Thappar*. Islamic ideology is a handy stick for flogging the people on to '*sirat ul mustaqeem*', the straight path set by the dictators and usurpers of the people's voice and their rights. They were not concerned with our welfare but wanted to deceive us into accepting them as their saviours – by hook or by crook, through violent repression or devious referendums. When Zia held his referendum, he declared himself synonymous with Islam. The few innocent voters who went to cast their votes went under fear of being apprehended and flogged for being anti Islamic.

It boggles the mind that in a country where Muslims are in a vast majority, Islam should be under constant threat. If the Palestinians or Kashmiris feel

threatened, it is understandable. But Islam is certainly under no threat here. If anyone is constantly threatened and needs protection, it is the poor, the minorities, the women, the children and our natural environment. Good Muslims should share the virtues and benefits of their faith instead of threatening others.

Should Islam hang like the sword of Damocles on our head instead of being a benign umbrella for the needy and the less able? 'Which of the bounties of your God will thou deny?' asks God more than once in *Sura e Rehman*. And who are the culprits keeping God's endless bounties from God's own men, women and children? There is today a new and a most rapacious ideology being advocated, the ideology that asserts that there should be no ideologies. This is a crass fascist imposition. It is everyone's right to hold a view as long as it is not forced on others. A pluralistic culture is the very essence of democracy where every individual can uphold a faith according to his belief, express ideas which best express his mind, freely defend values and actions, which are closest to his heart, without prejudice to anyone else.

A mind that tries to impose itself on others is of the lowest kind. Let a thousand flowers bloom, but let minds not be inhibited from freely expressing themselves. Instead of upholding static and absolute values, we should let diversity of ideas and free creative expression and economic justice be the

guiding principles for our culture, our ideology and
our national unity.

(30 Sept. 2003)

Half-empty Glass of Water

Is half a glass of water half-full or half-empty? It really depends on how you look at it. One person may think the glass half-full. The other may perceive it as half-empty. Intellectuals and the privileged in particular have propensity to dilate on the empty half. We have become champions at cribbing and finding faults. We cannot find virtue in anything.

It is true that the state and governments have done little for us to celebrate but let us also not forget that individually and collectively, in spite of endless trials people we have constantly demonstrated courage, creativity and talent for excellence. Let us not run ourselves down for selfishness and betrayal of others. Let us not depress the already depressed. Let's occasionally be the harbingers of good news. Let's try to uplift our spirits. Let us instead of cynical bickering inspire our self to positive action. Let us do something rather than passively wait for others to do so.

Surely criticism is an instrument of self-improvement. Negative things should not go unmentioned. But criticism can also become a tool to absolve oneself from individual responsibility by

directing anger at others. Someone observed the other day that the high moral ground has become so terribly crowded these days that it was best not to step on it. Everyone readily points his finger but few are accustomed to bend it to do something for fear of getting it hurt.

Shah Hussain, the great Sufi poet liked to present his person in a bad light. Being a radical Sufi, he was a *malamati*. *Malamat* is a stage in the Sufi discipline of Salook, which focuses on social practice and human conduct. He was perhaps the greatest scholar and poet of his time, befriended by learned members of the royal family and sought after by Akbar's court. He supported the cause of the rebel Dullah Bhatti and provided him refuge. If his royal devotees had not pleaded on his behalf, he would certainly have been executed along with the legendry hero. Shah Hussain publicly defied religious and social codes advocated by the Mullah and privileged society. In order to be close to the people he tried to become commonplace. He wore patched red robes, and contrary to the Mullah's Shariat he danced in the streets. Allowing oneself to be derided and held in low esteem in the opinion of others was at once a means of reining in the personal ego, and at the same time attacking hypocrisy and deceit.

Self-castigation in the context of Sufi belief makes sense; it aspires to spurn hypocrisy and inculcate humility, modesty and self-restraint. But criticism, as demonstrated by the Mullah on Friday

prayers or the liberal armchair elite at leisure can become a tiresome habit, flaunting personal conceit. Most of us love counting the lice in other people's heads and finding faults in things that surround us. We constantly crib, croak and chatter without pause. We can talk on any subject at any time and know what is best. We forget that we are endowed by nature with two ears and only one tongue, and accordingly we must at least listen twice as much as we talk. But we excel in verbosity; me too.

I must at my own expense, narrate the lesson I learnt from a fellow passenger who was seated next to me on an afternoon flight from Karachi to Lahore. He was an Australian working on an engineering project in Pakistan. This was his third visit. He seemed to be an agreeable person so I engaged him in small conversation. He was a patient listener and a man of few words – probably because I held forth on numerous issues ranging from our total lack of traffic sense to corruption in high places. I also fretted about how we liked to brag, our total lack of discipline and our ingrained love for rhetoric. Not realising the irony, I declaimed without pausing for breath for most of the journey. I must confess that as a captive audience he listened visibly with keen interest.

Soon the airhostess interrupted my harangue by announcing that in minutes we would be landing at the Lahore international airport. She asked the passengers to get into the upright position and fasten their seat belts. We were also reminded that we

should remain seated until the plane comes to a complete halt and not forget our belongings before proceeding out of the aircraft.

While I fumbled with the latch the foreign gentleman turned around with a reassuring smile and said, "You know! You are not as bad as you think you are" and then added, "I have travelled a lot but have not come across people who are as angry and cross with themselves as the Pakistanis." I felt stumped but before stepping out of the plane thanked him for his observation, which has stayed with me ever since.

However, let us not delude our self into believing that all is well. I am sure the man was being generous and trying to compensate for my bitter tirade at our failings. But at the same time let us also remember that it is unproductive and positively negative to talk only of our faults. I see individuals continuously run down their country and people in the presence of their children. There are many good things that are happening all the time. I think it would be healthier to focus on achievements rather than on listing failures. Some people just can't appreciate anything.

Here let me quote Mullo, who asks a friend that why she didn't accompany her husband for a holiday to Changla Gali. "It is too 'bore' for me", replied the lady with a shrug, adding, "take away the mountains, the forests, the waterfalls and the views and what's it got?" (Diary of a social butterfly, *The Friday Times*, March 12-18, 2004.)

I remember there were teachers at school who never tired of finding faults of their students. They would never compensate them with a word of encouragement. It is up to the teacher to help pupils discover the special talent with which they are endowed. Every individual is gifted with something rare. It is a challenge but always rewarding to discover it.

In any case it is more productive to focus on a person's assets rather than waste time mentioning his inadequacies. Adults without dreams have no business killing the dreams of the young. All dreams must be kept alive, nourished, obviously not on lies but by feelings that are born of a sense of wonder, uncommon courage of common people and vision of a world more human and just. I believe that while addressing evil that never ceases to descend upon us, parents, poets and painters should never cease to encourage; in particular the young so that they can benefit from our achievements that are creative, worthy and laudable.

(23 March, 2004)'

'Thoughts too Deep for Tears'

There is an animal hidden in each one of us – so they say. Man civilised himself rather quickly. The thick hairy hide changed into smooth skin but it is too frail to contain the animal inside us. Dr. Jekyll transforms into Mr. Hyde ever too frequently. Humans have upholstered themselves rather well, with their accomplishments in literature, art, philosophy and science. These achievements distinguish them from other animals not familiarised with finer feelings and complex thoughts.

It is ironic that man on the one hand is moved by the sight of a flower with thoughts 'too deep for tears' and yet kills for sport. Nay discovers ever-new ways of killing. He is the only animal who indiscriminately hunts other animals for pleasure and claims their heads for trophies. He is the only one who kills his own kind. There have been occasions when naked carcasses of humans were piled together so that the victors could be photographed; a memento of their successful hunt. Mercifully, man has so far refrained from preserving human heads and limbs to make table lamps and ashtrays. I am baffled at the satisfaction

some humans draw by inflicting pain on fellow humans and animals species, with whom we share this planet. Why do some children like to impulsively kill ants and insects without remorse? Why does a big fat bully delight in hounding and hurting a fellow student – half his height, three-quarter his size? Is it because we are urged to return to the nascent animal in us, or is it because half of us belong to God and the better half belongs to Satan? Or whatever but there seems to be something wary about our nature or composition.

I love visiting the zoo. Humans are so predictable; they are always trying to make a monkey of themselves by sadistically intimidating their betters for fun. On one occasion I saw a man throw a burning cigarette at the chimpanzee in the cage. He was the only one we had those days. As usual he looked lonely and bored; trying to wear out time without hope by pondering over the good days he spent up in the luscious trees with his family. I believe animals do have families like us. Mate and have babies and all that stuff.. I wonder where he was captured. Must have been swinging from tree to tree, throwing caution to the wind, with a love song in his heart when he got entangled in a poacher's net – silly romantic fool.

There he was in the cage now, old and grey, bereft of youth but abundantly compensated with wisdom. What was the use of wisdom *jab chirrian chun gaeen ghait?* But it gave him company in the endless empty hours punctuated by the arrival of morning and the disappearance of shadows at noon, their

reappearance and lengthening towards the evening, followed by a dark long night and the inevitable morning the next day. The endless diurnal fatigue of purposeless existence was visible in his eyes.

The cigarette that was flung fell short of the majestic ape. The chimpanzee was as usual lost in a reverie. For a fleeting moment he was distracted by tiny sparks that flew off the cigarette butt while landing on the rough cement floor. To my great surprise, he calmly sized the intrusive object and without even once glancing at the culprit, casually picked up the cigarette, briefly studied the smouldering end and then softly stubbed it out on the floor. He then reverted back to his speculations, not sparing a thought for the existence of the worthless human.

The perpetrator of the act was not ashamed. Instead, he grinned, revealing his swollen gums set with dirty teeth. I must say no one was amused; all frowned at the cur. I couldn't resist spreading the five fingers of my right hand and showing him the paw or what in the vernacular is called *khalla* to him. There was another scoundrel of a higher pedigree I saw feeding a charming lady crane. The crane skipped and pranced, tripped, jigged and careened. She was friendly and alert; swiftly caught with her beak the grain flung at her. Little did she know that for dessert she was to be served a burning butt of a cigarette? With alacrity she caught it in centre of her wide-open beak and then eagerly swallowed it over a delicate

pink tongue into her gullet. The dance of agony that followed was no Swan Lake. This delicate innocent crane was obviously not aware humans can be so devious and cruel. She writhed with excruciating pain, swashed her neck in all directions to abate her pain, uttering piercing shrill cries till he was hoarse and then silently collapsed on its two slender grey legs. The man was greatly amused. He must have had a tremendous sense of victory, the satisfaction of exercising power on others' life, different and dispensable. It would not have made a difference if the life form were human. He lighted a fresh cigarette, took a deep puff and leisurely sauntered off before I could hurl an appropriate adjective at him.

I was in the *muffassals* to condole with a friend who had lost a member of his family. After we had said the *Fateha* the conversation slowly drifted to sundry issues. The younger brother informed me, while we waited for lunch, that at one time the wild boar population around the Indus, for unknown reason suddenly depleted. It was a cause of concern for the local tribal lords who liked to chase the boar on their steeds and stick them with their lances for sport. How else could the recruits for the British infantry in India be trained?

On investigation it was discovered that a pack of wolves had arrived, God knows from where, and taken abode in the hills adjacent to the river. The wolves being wolves took joy in hunting the pigs for food as well as for the innate instinct to kill- or so my friend's

brother believed. My friend Major Amanulla, who after having hunted all his life has now become an avid supporter of Wild Life Preservation, would spurn the charge as a slander against the wolves. Whatever the actual truth of the matter how could the warriors be deprived of what was their traditional right. The wolves were hunted and put away. The warriors once again had a fertile ground to flush, chase and stick, and kill the wild boars and their young.

But that is not all. A wounded wild boar is not hastily disposed off. He is captured, bound and then thrown in the nearest water hole – this is done in fairness to the boar so that its vulnerable hind can remain protected in water – and then the dogs are unleashed on him. It is thus considered a fair game for both sides. The hounds attack the boar armed with his menacing sharp tusks in front. They cannot engage him from the rear because the back is immersed in water. At the end of the day no one defiles the dead. No one inserts the back end of the lance in the rectum of the boar whether dead or alive.

However, killing just for the sake of killing is not good enough. A warrior must not only be adept at killing but must also relish the kill. I wonder where the Americans train their warriors. I have given you a glimpse of how we trained ours.

(8 June, 2004)

PART III

The Artist's Own Genesis: Life, Life, Craft, and the Sparks of Creation

Contents

Part III:

- Seeking Strength from Innocence 230
- Standing on this Side of the Window 236
- Would you Rather Bang Your Head? 241
- NO Harm will Come Your Way 247
- Tricks the Eyes Play 253
- Sanctuary of the Silent Bed 259
- Live Now or Cash Later? 264
- Good Old Times at Quetta 269
- Modernism Revisited 274
- Frogs and Fakirs 280
- Art and Globalisation 285
- Art for the Sake of Art? 290
- Living the Moment 297
- 'Be Careful in the Future' 303

Seeking Strength from Innocence

When I was seven, like most other boys of my class, I liked to paint; among other things I liked doing landscapes with mountains, a stream descending to a green plain. In the foreground, we would draw a hut with a sloping red roof and smoke coming out of the chimney. The stream slowly broadened as it reached the hut. Most of us liked to add a few flowers to its banks and around the hut entrance. Rendering a bridge across the stream was structurally far too complicated to be attempted.

At seven we were becoming aware of perspective and the third dimension. We had no such problems when we were younger. Painting from imagination was much more fun. At seven, we had become conscious about the natural appearance of objects.

But coming back to the landscape we did. A semi-circle with radiating lines representing the sun was tucked in between two peaks to depict a sunset or sunrise according to the mood. For sunsets, I filled the descending sun with vermilion and blushed the sky with orange and yellow, which faded into blue. To

depict the birth of a new day the sun was left unpainted on the white sheet or painted lemon with radiating rays of the same colour, against a blue morning sky.

Birds were rendered with two strokes of the brush, resembling the alphabet V, with its two bars tapering out at various angles. Painting trees is never easy. We did them by individually adding leaves on to the brown branches, occasionally inserting fruit and a nest. The easiest flowers to paint were the single petal ones like daisies and sunflowers. No one ever tried painting a nasturtium, a chrysanthemum or even a blue bell. The easiest way of rendering flowers in the far distance was of course in the form of exclamation marks, by replacing the dot with blobs of red, yellow and blue, representing to short vertical green strokes representing stems.

As we proceeded to higher classes we learnt some other tricks. Expressing a gurgling stream coming down a mountainside was still a hazardous task, but the next best thing that an artist could do was to let it come down into the plains where it slows down. Compared to arresting a gushing stream on a sheet of paper, adding reflections to a placid surface of water is child's play. A glistening illusion of water and movement can be created if the reflected images are rendered in evenly-spaced horizontal brush strokes.

Incidentally while working with watercolours, as we learnt later, it makes life easier if light colours are filled in first and the dark ones later. It is a matter

of common sense. While a dark pigment can block out a light coloured pigment the same cannot be done in reverse. Just try putting yellow on blue or pink on brown. It is wiser and less wearisome to proceed from light colours to dark ones. With opaque water paints or with an oil medium it doesn't really matter what you do, but even so it is less messy to proceed from light to dark colours and from thin to thick paint.

For some odd reason, one of the first birds I learnt to paint was a crane – besides of course birds hanging in the distant sky flapping their wings. Painting the bird's long neck with the head and the pointed beak, even the oblong body, which tapered at the rear to form a tail, was not difficult. I always found drawing the lanky long legs and the claws an incredibly challenging undertaking. I could never balance the body on the fragile legs. The crane was either toppling forward or falling backwards.

Painting animals was no less easy. Bulls, sheep, rats and rabbits were the favourites. And of course, the butterfly, but that is not an animal. There was a boy from Kenya who impressed everyone by painting elephants, zebras and other jungle life. The children today, because of television, are exposed to a great variety of flora and fauna. Their artwork reflects a range of flowers, insects and animals. This is of course, only true of the English medium schools. The government and private Urdu medium schools don't seem to feel the need to encourage students creatively. Even writing the *Takhti* with a reed pen, which

provided an excellent aesthetic discipline, has been replaced by a ballpoint pen.

The younger, four- to five-year-olds are less inhibited than six-year-olds. They not only express their intentions with greater freedom but also experience the world more vividly and imaginatively. What appears to us as naive is rendered with unusual definition and vibrantly expresses their feelings, thoughts and sometime reactions to the adult world. Their images and visualised forms exist in simultaneous dimension of space and time that baffles the rational, deductive mind.

It is unfortunate how these artless, innocent and spontaneous visions of a child are slowly dissipated as they grow up. Actually, to treat their work as art would be equally absurd and illogical. Child art is like an instant revelation whereas Art, even at its most impulsive and involuntary moments is a conditioned enactment of adult mind.

An artist expresses himself for a number of reasons, his sense of alienation; his irrepressible need to vent his feelings, the need to understand life, the compelling desire to change it. Each artist has his own reasons and intentions. Each work has a meaning; in some cases, the meaning may lie in not having one. An artist cannot disengage himself from the times in which he lives even when he feigns to distance himself from what he does. He is condemned to exercise a choice even while asserting that the choice does not exist. A child paints for neither of these or any other

reason. He paints because it is his or her second nature. The innocent and simple truthful means they undertake for self-expression is soon severed. The adult world takes over and teaches them how to look, think and feel, what is good and what should be shunned. They are taught to be obedient and remain silent. They are firmly discouraged to laugh because happiness besides being a nuisance leads to levity, which could lead to sin. Above all they are conditioned in what to believe and what to hate.

Hating of course is more important than loving. The emphasis is less on what they should hold in esteem and more on what they must abhor. They must always envy their neighbour; keep away from the poor who are dirty, lazy and ridden with infectious disease. They are encouraged to cuddle up to the rich and privileged, and avoid friendship unless it is gainful.

I remember in the past most children would instinctively discard artwork after it was done. Today since most parents like showing off their kids as if they were poodles making them extremely self-conscious. To my bewilderment even four-year-olds expect their playful dabbling to be framed by the mother. To make a child self-conscious is the surest way of killing his special talent. He may mature into a clever fellow, but by invading his privacy the parent unwittingly inhibits him from expressing his natural virtues, which are above the scale of good or bad and beyond the criteria of our excellence.

Children, besides being naturally gifted with numerous sensibilities have a strong sense of personal dignity, which is easily bruised. Most adults unfortunately are unable to perceive their sense of self-respect with the same intensity. As a consequence, they constantly shame or embarrass them before others. If their elders possessed a better sense of self-respect, they would perhaps not do it. This is again something that could be learnt from children. Hamlet, that tragic prince of Denmark, sadly confided to Shakespeare that everything had gone rotten in the state of Denmark. Shakespeare who was too busy recording the events in blank verse unfortunately couldn't spare the time to help him out. The state of the world is even more rotten today. The monkey King Louis (Remember the *Jungle Book*) now knows how to make fire. He is bent upon presiding over the world even if he has to burn it down. Let us not let him do that.

Let's spend some time with the children and seek strength from their innocence. Let us, if not five times a day; at least once in five days seek them out from greasy restaurants, grimy auto workshops and garbage dumps. Should we not make an effort to better their world, even if we have failed to better our own?

(2 Sept. 2003)

Standing on this Side of the Window

"Indolence is not regarded a virtue but believe me it is not something which can be easily acquired either. I know many precious lives wasted in an effort at cultivating it. Indolence may lead to endearing private aberrations but it rarely leads to laudable public vice."

How can an artist know a subject without having intermingled with it? Subjects from life and nature, that are part of everyday discourse often, provide the richest raw material for art and literature. Incidentally there are sights you may have crossed on your way for years but never looked their way, and then in a moment they enter the depth of your being.

Nature is a flirt, ever eager to reveal. An artist on his part should have a wandering eye, ever alert to these revelations. There are subjects, which can be painted over and over again. For instance, there is this jaman with a vine clasped to its trunk, outside our bedroom window. I find them quite irresistible. I can't help looking out at them and I suppose they can't help looking in at me. It is quite amazing how a familiar subject can constantly change its appearance. The

moment you feel you have captured them, they present themselves in another guise, every season, every moment of day. It is an irresistible, constant provocation.

I must confess that painting is an astonishing activity. While painting the artist struggles to understand the world, simultaneously he strives to discover the means to express his feelings and ideas. This conflict, to concurrently engage the outside and inner life is the very spirit and essence of painting and for that matter all other creative pursuits. Artists who go place to place hunting for peculiar features and furnishings are clearly at odds both with nature and their creative self. Venturing into a new territory is delightful, but can be also terribly inhibiting. Individual vision of an artist demands that he reflects upon each prospect before attempting at entering into any form of correspondence. This required undertaking provides him with legitimate excuse to be idle.

I am that people who need to extract maxim labour out of others and do not regard indolence a virtue, but believe me, it is not something which can be easily acquired either. I know many precious lives wasted in an effort at cultivating it. Indolence may lead to endearing private aberrations but it rarely leads to laudable public vice. Unfortunately, in my case, a pen drawing or a sketch nudges me out of lethargic stupor to action. Once you get started you may not even feel the need to move from the spot and can continue to

paint one canvas after another by merely shifting the angle of vision or the easel a few paces from here to there. You would recall that every location has a prospect that instantly arrests attention and then there are elusive and more mysterious aspects that can only be leisurely unveiled in the course of individual perception. More often than not, these are the richer aspects. It is like going to a party where for a while you find a person extremely engaging, but soon you feel a bit worn out and spend the rest of the evening with a person who has been sitting quietly sipping his drink in the corner.

Frequently, a single partial aspect of the whole is quintessentially more expressive than the sweeping survey of the entire prospect – a Himalayan oak sheathed with velvet moss, ferns dozing on a forest slope. A sprig, a spray, a frond is often more expressive of the forest than the forest itself. Often lower tones are more audible than the loud shrill notes. A high note may jar; a low note penetrates the soul. Irony cut deeper than a hyperbole. In painting this is especially true of colour.

A few years ago, I was in Washington. Autumn was on the wane, but some of the trees were still ablaze. I find the American autumn one of the most over-painted subjects. Each year heaps of red, orange and lemon are applied to bolts of canvas, yet the vibrant nature and pensive feelings of autumn fail to be arrested. The resolute vivacity of autumn can't be expressed by transferring it to the canvas by aid of

mere pigments. It is best done by suggestion, by stirring feelings imbued with imagination.

Long ago a Chinese master aptly stated that colour was a matter of the imagination. You may look at Chinese paintings with their dark definitions and successive grades of grey and yet never notice the absence of colour because it is added to the painting from the palette of our imagination. The autumn must have different meaning for each painter. To me the American autumn was not just a matter of ravelling in colour, but an opportunity to reflect on a season that represents transience. How it ripens and then slowly fades. It was an awakening to the memory of bygone days, of the time wasted and of distant faces. Happily, the sense of loss was subdued with ambiguous feelings of satisfaction that often accompany self consciousness.

On my next visit to the US, I spent most of my time in Brooklyn. It was heart of winter and bitter-sharp cold. Trees seemed denuded of all life except that they solemnly stood their ground against a bleak sky. Soft green grass had turned lemon, and lemon to rough brown. There were of course moments of glory when the sun would break through the cemented sky igniting the solemn prospect, which sparkled with colour and a luxuriant assortment of textures. It was too cold to step out. Any way, looking out of a window cuts the glare, enabling to peer at objects with wider retinas. I was staying with my son Ahmed who stayed away most of the day at college for his medical studies.

This left me alone to myself endlessly. I used the opportunity to idly paint a number of views from the apartment windows. These paintings convey simple private feelings. When a person is alone and a little sad, he eagerly seeks comfort from familiar things. A façade flushed with sun, a maple tree mounting towards you, a solitary TV antenna, a desolate across the road, a receding brick wall, an un repaired fence, a dead stump, acquire curious significance. Looking at these common things on canvases, standing on inner-side of the window, the viewer cannot help feeling that he stands alone and perhaps trifle lost.

But should the artist be standing alone on this side of the window? Should he not be on the street with fellow humans, instead of watching bushes grow and paint peel off in the backyard? But these are questions each artist must answer for himself. However, time and again, when conduct of men and society fails to inspire an artist, he withdraws unto himself. Art really at its best is a joint venture. It is another matter some artists have made a virtue of estrangement and make profit of it. In the contemporary ethos, a cerebral artist must inevitably look inwards because his thoughts are not burdened with larger human concerns but reflects his precious personal identity. Under the prevailing exigencies what would you rather do? Passionately observe life and events with sympathetic disinterest or be active in fielding art ware which is prized for its obscurity.

(10 Dec. 2003)

Would you Rather Bang Your Head?

"Try embroidering a simple flower. If you can't get the thread through the needle, try painting one. If for some reason you would rather not, try whistling a tune thinking of the blossom you love best. If you can't even do these then every other day try banging your head on the floor; according to Confucius that should help."

I was rummaging through the drawer of my cupboard when to my immense delight I found a fragment of pink fabric with a red flower and two green leaves, embroidered on it. It was my daughter Mina's very first lesson in hand work at the Lahore Sacred Heart School. It was lying in an old empty cigar box, which I use for storing small bits and pieces and precious little mementoes. Mina is now a mother of little Tania who despite an occasional flash of temper, is quite a lady at seven; and Mustafa at five, already fancies himself to be a great athlete. Both like to draw and paint and voraciously run through **reams** of writing paper.

Personally, I am all for children being encouraged to work with their hands. While employing hands a person has to focus on what the hands are working at. When a person concentrates, he also thinks and while thinking inevitably new ideas and possibilities present themselves to the mind. "Man became man with the use of his hands". Usually, a person who has a good hand at writing also has cultivated conduct and manners. Individuals who are aesthetically arid are mostly also barren of mind and a bane to society.

When I reflect on the past and sometimes saunter back to childhood, I remember quite distinctly, that works of embroidery considerably stimulated my aesthetic imagination. My mother loved to embroider and was rather good at it. Like most active and concerned mothers, she knitted woollies for winter and spent other free time embroidering clothes, pillow covers, bed sheets and table covers. I never ever saw her sit idle. Even now when she is over eighty, she is irrepressible and insists on doing kitchen chores while the cook stands around doing nothing or conveniently disappears to relax somewhere. I recall that her arabesque and floral patterns were executed in different techniques ranging from *Taarkashi*, crochet to embroidery. I have succeeded in making a small collection of her handiwork, which I hope will encourage her great grandchildren to apply their hands to acquire and develop a skill.

Embroidery is a slow process, which requires, besides skill, an aesthetic sense and a sack full of patience. It is not an exciting art for people to stand and observe. My earliest memory of embroidery is of Murree. It wasn't actually embroidery in the formal sense. Instead of using fibre thread, the craftsman, who sat in a veranda about ten paces up Foggy's shoe shop, would pull out with a crochet lance, a lariat off a white paste resting on the mound of his left palm. He would then deftly manipulate this sticky web like thread to establish floral patterns on a dark silken cloth. These embossed patterns formed with the adhesive material were then sprinkled with powder pigments and delicately rubbed to imbue them with colour. The technique is no longer popular as it used to be in the 1950s.

But looking back, what I decisively liked best were the vibrant images fabricated by magic fingers of candy vendors in a matter of minutes. These vendors or rather mobile sculpture artists carried candy paste in successive stripes of primary colours around the top of a thick bamboo staff; the material for making likeness of birds, animals and familiar other objects. The rainbow of candy encircling the head of their staff not merely beyond temptation excited the children but cheered up the drabbest street. It is sad that they have dwindled away with time. The sweets wrapped in paper twisted to at both ends were not easily available in those days. Since then, the streets have been flooded with an incredible assortment of them. With poisonous clouds of dirt, dung and smoke sailing

through our cities I wonder, who would today be eager to order anything made of candy nakedly stuck on a pole?

Those days, I preferred to ask for an aeroplane, rather than the more attractive peacock with its long colourful tail. I was fascinated with aeroplanes in those days and dashed out to see one whenever it flew by. But that was rare. One of the great excitements for us children, on a train journey out of Lahore, was to steadily stare out of the window to catch sight of the grey birds parked at the Walton aerodrome. Unfortunately, more often than not, a lad would be stung in the eye by a nasty speck of coal dust blown over the train from the puffing chimney of the huffing train engine. It was not easy for any mother to pry into an eye, which was firmly shut and get the intruder out. There was never dearth of sympathetic advice. All concerned and sundry would sing in a chorus, "Don't rub! Just don't rub!" The child would invariably consider it a conspiracy against him and rub and rub more vigorously, causing more injury and pain. The eye in the end would look like an overripe strawberry, glazed with tears, dripping out like water from a leaking municipal tap.

The next highlight of the train journey used to be the mighty steel bridge built by the British across the Indus at Sukhar. At Sukhar the train stopped for a while to clean and replenish the tanks of individual bogeys with water. Some of the bogeys were then unhooked from the train proceeding to Karachi and

“shunted” on to the side line and hooked to the train designated for Quetta. A fresh, more spirited engine was always attached to the train required to chug the passengers up to Quetta. At Mach railway station, famous for unbearable heat, and an internment facility for political prisoners, an extra engine was added to enable the train up the steep gradient, through innumerable tunnels of Bolan Mountains towards cooler valleys of Baluchistan.

At Quetta, the finest embroidery was done by the Brohi women. They would in small groups visit my grandmother’s house in Quetta, dressed in most exquisitely embroidered flowing robes to take orders for embroidery. Later in the year, when we were back in Lahore after spending the summer vacations, my mother would proudly display her clothes so tastefully embellished with the Baluch embroidery. In passing let me mention, that while Brohis are ethnically Baluch, the tongue they speak belongs to the Dravidian group of languages.

It is amazing how creative are our people. They have intelligent hands and an innovative sense of decorative design. This is evident even when they are engaged in their most regular and menial chores. Have you seen, for instance, how our village folks leave conical dung cakes on top of their walls to dry? They are placed in a sequence to create a “kingra” or edging, which adds beauty to otherwise drab walls of an enclosure. Even the more common circular dung cakes are slapped onto the wall with a spontaneous accuracy

and inherent aesthetic sense. I have often seen canvases messed up by city artists with paint, but I have yet to experience a rustic wall, which a village lass has messed up with dung. In fact, a mere solution of dung and earth helps her to keep the floors and walls of her house smooth, clean and better toned than most urban houses with their ugly facades and layers of peeling paint.

It is a pity that anyone, who has been to an English medium school, ceases to appreciate the indigenous things around him. He often develops a blind spot about things, which are his own. He seeks abroad what lies within himself. In his intellectual waywardness, he denies himself the aesthetic resource at hand, of which he is an inheritor. He thus inadvertently, scorns and denigrates those individuals who have ensured continuity of our own particular way of feeling and responding to our functional needs, and our longing for inner peace and enrichment.

I must confess that whenever I hold an artefact brought to life by one of our craftsmen, I find myself instantly transported into another realm where I am at peace with others and myself. I wonder if it does the same to you. If it doesn't, try embroidering a simple flower. If you can't get the thread through the needle, try painting one. If for some reason you would rather not, try whistling a tune thinking of the blossom you love best. If you can't even do this then every other day try banging your head on the floor; according to Confucius that should help. (18 Feb. 2003)

NO Harm will Come Your Way

Art and literature have a unique power to set things on fire. They have magical attributes that can move mountains. That is why smart persons residing up in the castle connive to appropriate the talent of writers and artists. Inherently, art and literature are in conflict with the rulers. Poetry and painting aspire for change, whereas the state by its very nature resists change. Dialectically, **form** is the static element whereas **content** desires change. Content is the dynamic part that impels form to change. Form doesn't have a mind. The State is thus also devoid of feelings and creative thought, and can only think of new methods to preserve it and resist change. In human affairs, art and literature can drive people on by stirring emotions and ideas to change the inert State.

Form and content are both incompatible and inseparable. It is in the best interest of art and society that they should both caringly evolve to avoid conflict and chaos. Since among humans, needs and ideas continuously evolve, there is concurrent need for social forms to evolve and change accordingly. Regrettably it is not easy to forsake ideas and beliefs,

howsoever worn out they may have become with time. The rulers who control the State exploit this reluctance of people to resist change by either debasing or corrupting new ideas or outright declaring them treacherous; resisting them through brute force, deception and favours. They dread change for it weakens their hold. Samuel Huntington in *Clash of Civilisations* makes an interesting observation that it is not power that corrupts but the fear of losing power that corrupts.

The other day I was at a reception arranged in honour of a visiting writers' delegation from India. There were these good intentioned, foolish men and women, who believed in fighting for peace. I should have thought that having enemies and decimating them was a worthier pursuit. Any coward and a sissy can struggle for peace. It is not a martial art. The standard bearers of peace are mostly these twisted and dented (*wingay chibbay*) persons who seem to have all the time in the world to pass resolutions and spend time measuring the length of streets with tired feet. Striving for peace is a commonplace ideal of the weak, wretched, and seedy intellectual sweating for inane causes. They are a regular hazard for those who make sacrifices on their behalf to keep the world a 'safe place'. I fail to understand why increasingly people of the world prefer to wear the logo of a silly dove rather than brandishing the image of an eagle, even though when it is a bald one.

Unfortunately, there is never a dearth of foolish people in the world who support lost and weird causes. They are a noisy and contentious lot. I should have thought it wiser for them to measure their size before pushing the strong and the mighty around. Unfortunately, history is crowded with these silly sorts who take on Goliaths. If David had missed the slingshot, he could have got the whole town in trouble.

History is full of such cocky individuals who have an attitudinal problem. These types have smeared the tidy pages of history with their sweaty insolence and blood. Look what the Pharaohs built and what Moses left behind, not a single pyramid, temple, or a statue or two. If the ignorant Vietnamese peasants in dirty black vests and black pyjamas had not gotten restless, Vietnam could have been like Florida. But this was not to be. Let's hope the Iraqis demonstrate better sense. Shouldn't a country's sense of self-respect be commensurate with its poverty?

Ms. Ajeet Kaur, the leader of the Indian delegation, demonstrating arrogance of the rich, insisted that the weak must all stand up for their rights. Imagine she said, 'Freedom lies in the struggle.' Very funny! You know a person can actually get hurt in a struggle. I would rather be in a zoo, safe and well-fed rather than taking risks on the street for something so intangible as Peace and Rights. If at all, Rights need to be curtailed. Look at our children they talk back at us and come back home so late. You have

all the rights, don't you? You can even go hungry if you like. Rights! My big toe!

There was another Indian writer who informed the audience that God uttered one word 'Kun' and the world was created and subsequently the writer added that man today possessed awesome power to destroy the world by just pressing a single button. I suppose the dull point he wished to make was that man has become God's equal in the negative sense. Ajeet Kaur, a mere woman not more than eighty kilos warned those who rule the world, "Don't sow seeds for which you might have to go through hell." I say, what we care for such frail threats!

The banner under which the leaders of the writers' conference were seated was scrawled with the motto, 'Pen for Peace.' What has literature and poetry to do with peace? In the early seventies, straying from the established and approved course, I produced a string of canvases based on the important concerns of the time. Some of them were anti-war and focused on the problems of the *third-rate world countries* and their wasteful struggle for independence, democracy and freedom from want. A group of 'modern' artists labelled them as posters. Modernism that began as revolt against old values they opined must now be exclusively infused with aesthetic obedience. Most of the paintings were censored and excluded from exhibitions. Evidently literature and art seeking freedom and peace involuntarily transforms into propaganda? Actually,

writers and artists must focus on their inner metaphysical concerns and not be diverted by base every day social realities.

Once the trouble makers in the third-rate world have been silenced; mothers who launch their children as evil freedom fighters are eliminated, automatically there will be peace. It is a matter of common sense that without the vanquished there cannot be victors, and without victory there cannot be peace. If the Vietnamese had allowed Vietnam to be napalmed and agreed to have it levelled with tanks, there could have been more land available for growing rice and laying serene classical gardens. Vietnamese could thus be better-fed and better set to reap the benefits of modern economy. People who eat with chopsticks just don't know what is good for them? Anyway, that is history. Let us hope for better results in other parts of the world.

But getting back to matters of personal security, being in a zoo or being behind the safety of bars should be safer. I believed this until I went to buy a chicken for dinner. Buying a chicken in developed countries is visibly devoid of delight. The chicken lies inert, clean and well-dressed. Buying a chicken in Pakistan is a lively sport. You order a chicken; the butcher opens a small inlet to the cage, where there is a peaceful population of broilers. Since I knew that the best ones have a healthy red crown, I insist on the bird, which I want. The butcher shoves his bloody hand into the cage, holds the fowl by the neck, a leg or a wing

whatever is handy and pulls it out. The unlucky bird utters frightful cackles, which makes by passers come to a dead stop. There are terrifying supportive cackles in the cage, but soon the birds settle down; each at ease for being spared. Normal life is restored, picking a grain here, pecking and pushing a companion there; excreting droppings ever more frequently.

In the meantime, their erstwhile companion has been slaughtered, feathers pulled and skin peeled off the steaming body, which is then adroitly chopped into the required number of pieces; four, eight or sixteen. The birds, which have perchance survived, return to live their normal lives in the belief that what has happened to others, will not happen to them. The bloody hand invades the pen again and another bird disappears. The life goes on as usual in peace and safety of the cage believing that no harm will come their way.

(28 Oct. 2003)

Tricks the Eyes Play

"The four minarets of the Taj, which should recede inwards towards the dome of the royal mausoleum, remain adamantly perpendicular. This is achieved by constructing the minarets to lean away from the dome so they appear straight."

Once you are through defiles of the Karakorum, car engines have to be revved up in top gear to make the final ascent to the top of the Khunjrab Pass, which is at an incredible height of about 14,000 feet. You don't have mountain peaks of that height in most countries. The famous Matterhorn in the Alps in Europe is around 4478 metres which is about 15,000 feet. If you are driving up straight from Gilgit, it is advisable not to get out of your vehicle and saunter around surveying the scenery. At that height the rarefied atmosphere is short in oxygen and likely to make you dizzy and cause a severe headache.

After crossing over the Khunjerab Pass the road casually starts descending into China and soon approaches the Pamir Mountains. Unlike the narrow gorges and forbidding mountains of the Karakoram Range colliding into each other like mad bulls, the road

now passes through a broad valley, flanked by gracious hills and mountains tamed by blizzards and dust storms. There are long flat tracts, where the road runs straight converging to a point in the far distance. The telephone poles, pacing along the road also successively diminish in scale. I have always wondered why distant things look smaller. Why the eye is so easily deceived into believing what is not true?

In early Mughal miniatures all objects are their usual actual size, but a sense of space is suggested by dividing the painting into several horizontal sections. The top section represents the farthest distance; the middle section represents the middle and the bottom section the foreground. This is the method followed by the paintings of *Dastan e Amir Hamza* and the *Akbarnama*.

At the end of the fourteenth century, Filippo Brunelleschi laid down the mathematical laws of linear perspective, which made it possible for artists to create a convincing illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface. From a fixed point all lines would converge to a single point, known as the vanishing point on the horizon. The objects were placed one behind the other in depth, proportionate to how they would appear to the viewer if he stood fixed at a point. Elements receded in depth to create an illusion of distance.

The Mughals on the contrary suggested distance by making the eye move from the bottom upwards or

the other way round. That is why their paintings were designed in horizontal panels. They cleverly established a sense of distance rather than an illusion of depth. It also enabled the artist to present activities and incidents simultaneously occurring at different places and sections of the painting.

Later Mughal paintings assimilated the Brunelleschian method of depicting space. They however, did not practice it with the same boring mathematical precision as for instance Antonio Pollaiuolo and others did in Florence. In the Renaissance Brunelleschi's perspective became a toy in the hands of many artists, who loved playing around with it. Some Renaissance architects also employed it to create dramatic illusions.

The Mughal architect also employed the laws of perspective but with a different intention. His object was to correct visual distortions that appeared to the eye while seeing objects in space. The Taj Mahal is a good example. At the red sand stone entrance to the Taj, a visitor is ushered in through blue and white calligraphic panels, which frame the tall gateway. Because of the height of the entrance, the horizontal top panel of the gate should appear smaller in size than the two panels flanking it. Similarly, the two perpendicular panels should progressively narrow in breadth as they proceed upwards. Amazingly the panel does not appear any narrower as it reaches the top. The size of the panel and the calligraphy are exactly the same near the top as they are at eye level.

The Renaissance painter used the linear perspective to create an illusion of depth; the Mughal architect employed it to correct visual distortions of the naked eye seeing objects in space. They proportionately increased the size of elements as they rose above eye level. This method is applied to both the structural design as well as geometric and floral decorations with which the Taj is so sparingly embellished. One never notices unless it is specifically pointed out that the four minarets, which should appear to recede inwards towards the dome of the royal mausoleum, remain adamantly perpendicular. This is achieved by constructing the minarets to lean away from the dome, so that they may appear straight to the eye, at a perfect right angle.

In Italy, the linear perspective enabled the Renaissance artist to create limitless illusion of depth on a wall or a small canvas. Linear perspective encouraged foreshortening of human limbs and acute angles of vision that dramatised action and lent a sense of urgency to the viewer. The viewer was transformed to becoming a spectator.

In previous paintings, an episode was presented to the viewer but now he was made to feel part of the event. In order to depict depth, human limbs were foreshortened that necessitated employment of the chiaroscuro technique, the use of light and shade. Light invaded the picture in order to create shadows and lend roundness to objects. With the invasion of light, a whole new chapter opened up in painting. The

element of light is not merely the great giver of life but is perhaps also the greatest instrument for creating a visually convincing illusion of life and nature in a painting. With time, the chiaroscuro of Michael Angelo melted into the vivid colours and chaste hues and tones of Giorgione, Titian, Veronese and other Venetian artists. One can detect early perception of these elements by Leonardo in his rendering of a landscape in the far distance behind the Mona Lisa.

However, there is not one but many different ways of cooking a dish. There are several ways of reaching a viewer's mind and heart and deluding his eye. Colour according to a Chinese master is a matter of the imagination. This had never occurred to me but I find it from my experience pertinent. Bolts of canvases and tons of red, yellow and orange paint have been squandered over the decades to portray the American autumn and yet rarely has any one succeeded in capturing its colours. Just because an artist has squeezed flaming pigments on his canvas does not mean that he is on his way to capturing autumn.

It was only after this realisation that I discovered that many Chinese scrolls depicting mountains and cliffs with pines tenaciously growing out of their rocky flanks, peonies and still-life objects ranging from shrimps to persimmons, were not rendered in colour but with grades of black or brown inks. Each grade of ink, ranging from a breath of silver to black velvet, somehow appeared to me as a shade of colour. It

seems something had touched my imagination, luring my mind into actually perceiving colours.

Great artists and writers, instead of just depending upon their own creative faculties and descriptive power, often rely on the feelings and perceptions of readers and viewers, alluring their imagination to conjure up colour, smells and images. In the context of the theatre this has been termed 'willing suspension of disbelief' by the audience. Let me end this by narrating a story, leaving you to ponder over which is the better course to take. The famous Greek artist Zeuxis was a great naturalist painter. Once he rendered grapes so realistically that finches flew down from a nearby tree and pecked at his painting. How amazing? What skill and sense of observation he must have possessed?

Many of our children's book illustrators today can't even draw a rabbit. But any way, there was another artist, a Chinese Taoist who painted a crane on a tavern wall, which had been plastered with dung. The picture was done in payment for the wine he had imbibed. The story goes that after he had completed the painting he suddenly jumped on the bird's back and flew off into the blue sky, leaving the wall as blank, they say, as the tavern keeper's face. How is that for a painting? Would you rather sit and eat grapes or take a flight into the unknown with a one- way ticket?

(9 Sept. 2003)

Sanctuary of the Silent Bed

I wish my friend the crow was back. It could awaken citizens from their slumber. What they need is not the cooing of a dove but the cranky croaking of the crow to rid them of their nightmares, lest they slip into oblivion.

The eccentric crow that habitually croaked at odd hours of the night has been quiet lately. His incessant croaking kept me up many nights, speculating, worrying, savouring and suffering in silence about matters looming larger than their real size. The intrusion of familiar sounds and smells often diffuse the frightening aura of silence by pricking the senses back to normality. Silence can be as fearsome as the dark seamless surface of a fathomless pond the colour of steel; a single ripple instantly dissipates the effect.

Absorbed in self generated fears and peppered fantasies, I stayed in the sanctuary of my bed. I cursed the mother that laid the rotten egg for this wretched bird had to crack open; couldn't find the energy to step out and articulate my anger in suitable words. It is difficult to spot crows at night in any case. I wonder

where the rogue has disappeared. I hope the stray black cat that has produced a litter of rather cute kittens, some with white spots, has got him by the throat. Cats come in many colours but crows are all dressed the same way in black, are far too smart for the cats to nab.

Every morning these days the wooing of a dove wakes me. Fortunately, there are no roosters around and I am lulled back to sleep by the dove's almost inaudible pensive notes. The vagabond crow has been silent for weeks now. I hope he has not left our neighbourhood. I hate to confess I have started missing his jarring cries. What is in a voice? Most of us can't sing a melodious tune. I wonder what ailed him to croak and caw so fretfully.

When a person has nothing to do, he is disposed to ponder over peculiar issues. For instance, what is good and evil? Don't they constantly trespass on each other's identities? Do they have fixed frontiers as it is made to appear by organised religion and the state? Shouldn't evil, that is constantly found 'Guilty!' be provided a defence council and virtue be more strictly scrutinised for it is always found not guilty and acquitted? Everyone can bed with virtue, but putting up with evil is another matter; a matter of vivid imagination.

Virtue is a commonplace attribute. It is like buying a bus ticket for a trip to an uncertain destination. Evil makes no such claim but takes courage to expose virtue's innate arrogance. It tears

opens virtue's aesthetic exterior stuffed with edifying verbiage. Virtue is a medley of compromises and promises, evil a host of uncertainties. Why does evil fascinate the human imagination? Is it because there is a prosaic banal end to virtue - a person dies and proceeds to live better - but there are no limits to evil?

Literature is full of virtuous people who are positive bores, whereas the bad ones are fascinating and remain permanently fixed in the mind. Is it because the experience of being merely virtuous is based in contrast confrontation with evil, which defines and determines the endless possibilities of human nature and aspirations? Evil in close proximity of individual existence propels it towards self-awareness. Virtue pleads individuals to be virtuous by suffocating the human soul with an acute sense of guilt. Evil liberates thoughts and feelings from dictums of society that shackle individual expression. Evil spurs to ride on, virtue the white rag of surrender. Evil stands on its feet, virtue on its knees. Evil stops at nothing; curious to peep and penetrate in the farthest reaches of creation and the deepest recesses of human flesh. Virtue is like a fat blindfolded ox that moves in circles believing it is proceeding on a straight path. Evil lives and spends its gains; virtue counts and adds them.

Virtue is suspicious of love and passion and as a poet said reluctant to leap into the *Aatish e Namrood*. Evil dares and will not be reined. Perhaps it is about time that evil is fairly judged and virtue cut down to its

dusty size? These are serious, tangible issue obscured by metaphysics. Cautious infertile minds have been protecting virtue like an infant from harm's way.

I wonder why people are afraid of darkness, when it is time for people to call it a day from daily commerce, kiss their children to bed and make love. Can it be denied that most crimes in a man's life are committed in broad daylight? Victims are denied justice, the poor are exploited and their labour misappropriated, people lie, deceive, rob, cut each other's throats, rig elections, abuse laws and declare martial law. The glare of virtuous day is blinding.

At night, in the cover of darkness, we are made to believe evil raises its head and crawls out from secret places to poison the innocent. The toiling millions are instantly stricken, many try to stretch the day, some are inebriated drinking their own poison, and others indulge their pleasures at leisurely haste. There is one or two who break into a house with ill intent. But so, what? Most robberies that affect human lives take place in broad daylight. And what about love, it is regarded sinful for it rarely smites the virtuous; for them any *hour* will do.

Why darkness is then considered evil? What frightens the virtuous is the fear of the unknown; fear of nightmares spun by the virtuous doing virtuously well. Evil walks the night and laughs in the day - at the foils and follies of the virtuous.

I wish my rogue friend the crow was back. He could awaken good people from their slumber. What

they need is not the cooing of a dove but the cranky croaking of the crow to rid them of their nightmares, lest they slip into oblivion, tossing and turning in the sanctuaries of their silent beds.

(2 November, 2005)

Live Now or Cash Later?

A time comes a person begins to feel that things should come to rest. Why just linger around? Even our green earth will cease to be one day; if rapacious men inflated with greed and arrogance don't destroy it earlier.

Would you say that a tidy end was any better than an untidy one when on both occasions you are unlikely to be around to see it happen? Most of us are romantics deluding ourselves into believing that our going will cause an unbearable loss to others. Life goes on at its petty pace and actually no one cares. Things are forgotten sooner than we think. We are getting increasingly estranged from each other and the world in which we exist. Who was it that asked, Mother died yesterday or was it the day before?"

I have heard men grumble at *janazas* (funerals) and mutter complaints more loudly at *quls* (prayer and condolence gathering) if they are held up at golf time in the afternoon. Relatives of the deceased are best advised to organise funerals without taxing the patience of their aggrieved friends. And yet we fancy seeing ourselves in favourable dramatic settings. We

imagine that the gallery will profusely applaud when we are declared 'Out' and visibly sympathise with us over the intervention of the umpire for not allowing us to complete a century. Once we are assured that the player will never return to bat again, he is credited with exceptional talent - in spite of his terrible record.

Life is immensely contrary and amazing in its diversity, ultimately devoid of substantial meaning and yet so poised and full of purpose. It is essentially bland like boiled cabbage; judicious sprinkling of salt and pepper can pep it up; but that is about all. It remains crass in its sameness, irrespective of whether you are hovelled in a mountain cave or an apartment in a city; ride a horse or an automobile; inclined to slaughter the weak for personal or collective gain; you have or lack a liking for plundering the bounties of nature. Has life moved ahead? Yes, it has in same direction! Some of course can take pride in reinventing and improving upon the attributes of barbarism.

What makes life move is the overwhelming need to abate hunger and sate material needs. Individually, above all, it is the irresistible sensation that bubbles in us to believe that we are special and can be better - with some luck could even be unique. We all feel that our inner life is unusual, more valuable than others. This is the magic of life - the whore makes everybody feel special. Life enters into private conference and seduces whosoever comes to life.

Take it or leave it? Life can always be snubbed and spurned by men of faith wandering off to

extraterrestrial paths. Alternatively, it can be bent and distorted in pursuit of material assets and power. The difficult part is to live and abide by it.

Inanimate objects have a life of their own. A pair of brand-new shoes is infused with life, acquiring meaningful identity by its incessant use. Men in new clothes often look similar to mannequins in shopping arcades. There are houses that are well kept up; there are homes that are well lived in. There are houses that demonstrate wealth. There are houses that are designed for gracious living. There are houses and houses and houses. There are rich houses that are contrary and poor homes that share miseries of their dwellers.

Whenever I stare into a bland blue sky, not animated by the wings of birds or loitering clouds, I am petrified by the thought that whatever has been created is governed by a system of fixed rules that have no concern with my speculative considerations. The criminal and the saint both fade away with time. I am convinced that a time will come when the time itself will come to an end. But do all ends have new beginnings? I am sure they do. I believe there will always be rebirth. If there is a beginning, how can an end shut down without engendering a new beginning?

Returning to what we were about, the Good, Bad and Ugly would all drown if ducked in water beyond limits set by nature. Men and women cannot fly although the latter are often referred to as birds. It is science that has enabled humans to propel into space and time. Science has enabled us to peer into the

heavens and peep into the heart of an atom - unfortunately not our own or that of our fellow humans.

A man of science has a better perspective on creation than a man of faith divorced from the laws that make the clock work. Ironically, the man of science admits to knowing so little, the man of faith claims to know all. Can faith that is not inspired by beauty and awed by the secrets that govern creation lead humans anywhere? It will surely lead men and women to ignorance and chaos rather than heaven or hell. The conflict between faith and science is best illustrated by the conduct of a cat and a dog. There was a time when science and magic/religion were one. The conflict between the two has sharpened since the dawn of civilisation.

The religious ideologues see science as a threat to their position as sole lawmakers and interpreters of the world. They try to appropriate every sphere of our life. They act as barbers, insisting how we should to shave or pluck hair. They act as tailors circumscribing the length of our *shalwar*, the baggy trouser. They encroach on our love life and are haters of the rubber. They insist that love is an obscene consideration for marriage. It is understandable why the priest and the mullah have deliberately nurtured prejudice and ignorance. They preach a static notion of religion; permanently frozen in time. There have been, on the contrary, men of faith who advocate a more dynamic idea, where religion chides man to action in order to know his self and the universe better. Religion is not

merely a set of social rules and laws set to govern life. It is not there to provide answers but asks us to answer questions. Unarmed with empirical passion and the tools of science man has no choice but to prostrate himself to ignorance and authority.

Today there is for us an urgent need to put *aaq* and *akhrat* in a divine perspective. It is unimaginable that *akhrat* can be won without love and a sense of beauty, the tools of science and the will to better the God's world today. If that were possible wouldn't life become less tiresome? After all ignorance, as a sage said, is a great bliss. However, life in ignorance would be no life; non enigmatic, weary and tedious?

(26 January, 2005)

Good Old Times at Quetta

Quetta once used to be a neat, fruity place. My father was born and raised in Quetta, because grandfather had made it his second home. Even after his retirement, he would without fail spend his winters in Lahore and his summers in Quetta. I remember in the boarding school at Aitchison; I would look forward to spending the summer vacations in Quetta with considerable anticipation. Even now, though my grandfather has been dead for 48 years, I never miss an opportunity to visit Quetta. Quetta brings back to me the fond memories of my grandfather, who looked like Stalin, and his gentle son, my father, and his friends who have all slowly passed on with time. The town itself has changed beyond recognition. The aesthetically pleasing fruit and meat markets located in the city centre have been pulled down and replaced by a ghastly multi-storied building, which brings to mind Kafka's Castle. Almost all-roadside mulberry trees have disappeared; a glorious avenue of maple trees on the 'thandi sarak' have perished and callously replaced by some innocuous ferns. The Quetta I knew is dying; a part of it is already dead and gone.

Very first oil paintings were done in Quetta in the courtyard of my grandfather's house and later a landscape in which the eye recedes to a great distance, looking over the Cantonment towards the Hanna Lake. I painted this second oil, perched on a corrugated tin roof in summer, which gave me a slight fever and I was never allowed to climb up again.

The first painting depicting the inner courtyard of our house is still in my possession, but the second one was unfortunately lost in England with about a dozen other paintings. The only condolence I have is that they disappeared along with the gallery that held them in custody. There were two night scenes; the Lahore Railway Station and the nearby *Bhur Wala Chawk*, done in 1959. There was one of *Caladiums* in terracotta pots, with broad green leaves, their vermillion veins and speckled with pink dots, arrayed against a latticed grill done earlier in Karachi. There were also some works I had done in London at Hampstead; a window with icicles in the winter of 1961, and a row of houses facing the bedroom window at Queens Gate, Bayswater. I can't recall if there was anything else. Yes! A *Still-Life*, which had been accepted for the Commonwealth Exhibition held in London in 1961- the least exciting of the works.

In recent years one of my memorable excursions around Quetta was the journey up the Wali Tangi beyond Orak. I spent the whole day sketching Junipers, some dangling from crevices and some drowned and dying in the water reservoir. I visited the

place again a few years later in 1992, but it failed to invoke feelings that were roused on the first visit. I made a few studies but this time they were mostly of rock formations and cliffs. The trip to Ziarat was more productive where I did two water-colours and some charcoal sketches. On my return to Quetta, I made a study of a superannuated almond tree which stood in a friend's residence.

All these years I had wanted to paint Koh-e-Murdar; the barren peak of the dead mountain that dominates the Quetta city. I spent practically all the summers of my youth under its quite solemn presence, but not once did it smile, frown or in any way beckon me. It wears expressionless visage and yet in its own way it is a handsome peak. Opportunities have come my way but something or the other has not been right. Merely to paint is not the point. It is a question of investigation, exploration, elaboration but above all of establishing rapport. A Mountain is a mountain, but often it can be more than what it appears to be. I missed many opportunities; sometimes one didn't have the tools, on other occasions the mood or the view was not right. For instance, the last time I was in Quetta, I was staying in the cantonment in a house with a lovely garden. Rising above and beyond in the east was my Koh-e-Murdar. A manicured lawn in the foreground, a row of Cana lilies and fruiting apple trees in the middle with Koh-e-Murdar above was not my mountain. My mountain is composed of hard Spartan rock, eternally silent; indifferent to the freezing winds that spray its

temples with flurries of snow as they sing their chilling odes. Or is it he who deigns to whisper to them in the dark night? The mountain stands aloof above the city comprising of houses hurriedly but neatly fabricated with pale brick or adobe and mortar, after the city's destruction by the infamous earthquake that took about fifty thousand lives in 1938. I found a somewhat similar setting in Astore and helped myself to it as the second-best thing. The painting was acquired for the National Assembly but I wonder if it survived the fire that engulfed the building.

The Northern Areas of Pakistan, like Baluchistan in the west have barren mountains and rich green valleys. The Northern regions are however a hundred folds more dramatic. It seems that it was only yesterday a mighty force raised the entire mountain system; one has an uncanny feeling that the mountains may move and shift their ground at any moment. Here, in the Karakorams instead of gracious folds one is confronted with rock strata striking off at tangents. Evidently once they must have rammed into each other with brute force, shattering gigantic boulders into smithereens. On the way to the Khunjerab Pass, beyond Passu and the Batura Glacier, the manner in which rocks and boulders are scattered about and the way the rock face is pitted and cracked, it appears to have been a battlefield of some titanic warriors. Virtually there is no life in evidence. One has a weird feeling of being watched. As you proceed on an eerie silence descends into the singing valley. It is only on reaching the Khunjerab Pass that you heave a

sigh of relief. Small conversation comes to life again. The sight of a crystal pool frosted at the rims, encircled by alpine grass and spotted with violet flowers helps to restore a degree of normalcy. What a contrast between the narrow defiles of the Karakoram and the broad vista of the Pamir valleys, as you course through them on your way towards Kashgarh. On my journey or rather journeys to the northern areas I have always had a most compelling inspiration to paint, which I did but mostly on the canvas of the mind. Bushes bearing bourbon red flowers skirting along a mountain stream, a mulberry grove with dangling grapevines; bronze afternoon light tracing the contours of shrubs and bushes and impatient streams coursing through dark rocks; apricot trees with their autumn leaves turning lemon with vermilion tips and wild grasses with varied hues; mountain peaks brusquely ascending into cloudless sky, steadily meeting your stare, haughtily keeping their heads aloft in the heavens. Solemn peaks, mysterious peaks, forbidding peaks, there were peaks and peaks to daunt and challenge your imagination.

(15 Dec. 2003)

Modernism Revisited

A modern artist in our countries must rely on his physical environment and firsthand experience. At the same time, he should not isolate himself from artists in the west. It is better to learn from others and move on than to stay put and ape oneself. Modernism is an invitation to an artist to be always on his toes and to renew himself.

During the colonial period, looking back at the past to excavate for lost traditions was part of the political and cultural struggle to re-establish national identity. This is what Chughtai claims to have been doing in the twenties along with Tagore and others of the new Bengal School.

In the field of culture and the arts there were basically three courses open to artists in those days. First, to revive the traditional methods of painting (Mughal, Pahari, Rajput and Ajanta); second, to establish links with rural life and village craftsmen and gain from their spontaneous manner of visualising objects and motifs ingrained in their consciousness for centuries through incessant practice; and the third, to acquire the manner and

technique of Western painting. All three were wrought with hazards and difficulties. Artists had to be vigilant for they could easily get lost or trip over a pothole. Journeying into past can so easily induce a person to nostalgically recline his head and imagine a heroic past, or be encouraged to rest on bank of a village pond and peer at a herd of buffaloes disappearing into the sunset, through a mystic haze of his personal fancy. The romantic excursions can be observed in some painters even today. The infatuation with rural life and belief in untainted vision of the village artisan inspired several painters to evolve an idiom of expression that was both national and modern. Amrita Sher Gill in the Punjab had demonstrated a metropolitan way of doing this by drawing upon rural life via the post-impressionism as well as indigenous miniature painting. In Calcutta, Jamini Roy devised a manner of incorporating folk images in his populist version of modernism. It is interesting to note that by now many progressive artists' groups had come into existence. However, instead of adopting a proletarian outlook, the artists continued to focus primarily on folk tradition. Actually, there were only a few artists like Zain ul Abedin - famous for his Bengal Famine sketches - in these groups. Majority of the artists had progressive intentions but were moulded by a bourgeois consciousness. Like Sadequain and M.F. Hussain they could not proceed beyond creating generalised forms celebrating human endeavour and expressing an egalitarian outlook. They were

instruments of cultural change but kept away from political activism.

An artist who continuously appropriates a tradition without contributing anything of his own not only exhausts the tradition but also drains himself. In order to sustain and keep a tradition refreshed, new forms and ideas have to be added to it. Failing this, the traditions die. A number of our artists largely depended on traditional images and motifs, mostly of Mughal and Pahari origin. Archaeological material from the Indus and Gandhara civilisations and ethnic sources were also a rich treasure to plunder. The logical next step for this kind of painting – to which certain forms of calligraphy can also be added – is to rarify and mass-produce it for the tourist trade. More money can be made out of the products with a larger output and slick commercial fabrication.

The problems confronted by the third course were slightly more complex. During the period of colonisation our intelligentsia was made to believe that in order to develop and modernise ourselves we had to learn from the West. Some of us thought that we could become modern merely by wearing English clothes and acquiring a smattering of English. In the same vein, many of our artists believed that in order to improve and modernise they just needed the perspective and the skill to copy the surface effects of European oil painting. To be modern in the colonial period thus required the ability to paint in the tradition of the Italian Renaissance. This is what Anna

Molka Ahmed, asked to establish the Fine Arts Department at the Punjab University at end of the thirties, induced her students to practice.

It is strange that while Lockwood Kipling the founding principal of the Mayo School of Arts and the curator of the Central Museum personally visited the homes of old families of miniature painters, persuading them to send their children to join the Mayo School, Anna Molka was not urged to encourage the traditional arts. Most of her students had their noses up on accosting a traditional *desi* artist. Even the great Chughtai was not thought much off. 'Chughtai Art' was regarded as an anathema to the modern sensibility practiced in the Department.

Anna Molka introduced the basic techniques for teaching European painting and equipped students to draw and paint. She spurned the indigenous art. and at the same time. eyed with suspicion the new trends emerging in Europe after the First War. She published small booklets on aspiring young modern painters like Shemza, Ahmed Pervez, S. Safdar, Moyene Najmi and Haneef Ramay and enabled them to exhibit at the Department. Shakir Ali, regarded a pioneer of modern painting in Pakistan today, held his first show at the Department, but Anna Molka didn't really care about the concerns of the modern generation of painters. In 1960, when Sadeqain's painting, *Person at Sand's Pit* - that had quite unexpectedly won first prize at the third National Exhibition - appeared at the Fine Arts Department, everyone was encouraged to find

faults with it, particularly its drawing. Frankly, I rather liked the painting and, in the pictorial, -aesthetic context didn't find anything terribly wrong with the drawing either. But that is how things were at the Department. The students were hardly ever taken to saunter beyond Cézanne. Khalid Iqbal also taught at the Department. He was knowledgeable but held his views. I cannot recollect anyone taking courage to contest him or look over his shoulder to envisage a vision of his or her own.

In the colonial period, the colonial artist was made to feel that he was at the bottom step of the ladder and the western artist at the top. The west could help him climb up if he agreed to learn to emulate. In the post-colonial era the Third World or the Developing Countries, as they are called today, underwent two distinct phases. In the first phase, the Developing Countries were no longer treated as though they were at the bottom of the cultural graph but made to believe that they were on the fringes of the world's cultural centre, which was first, Paris, and later in the sixties, New York. During that period the Third World artist was treated as a representative of a minority culture who therefore could not be considered really Modern. In the second phase a decade later, the word Contemporary came into circulation. In order to be Contemporary, an artist had to create global art that spurned national and regional perceptions. That is why it is difficult sometimes to tell whether some works of art are from Asia or America. To enter this seemingly Contemporary 'neutral zone',

as a critic put it, an artist of a 'Developing Country' had yet again to get his or her visa endorsed from the West. In the context of this third option - to become modern - the artist had to remain on the receiving end and be a perpetual recipient.

The Post-Modern Movement seems to defend minorities, gender issues and marginal cultures and expressions. In recent years there has been a growing tendency to emulate its techniques and aesthetic conventions. It is pertinent to remember, however, that Post Modernism itself is a product of the inner crises of Modernism. While it spurns the role of the *avant-garde* and highlights few issues that are everyone's concern, it also eschews high moral ground by trivialising the collective cultural tradition. For an artist from our countries to be modern it is fundamental for him to rely on his own physical environment and firsthand experience. At the same time, he should not isolate himself from artists in the west who have common concerns. It is better to learn from others and move on than to stay put and ape oneself. Modernism is neither a style nor a set of fixed rules and forms. It is an invitation to an artist to be always on his toes and to renew himself.

(15 Sept 2004)

Frogs and Fakirs

'Abstract' is a Latin word that means to take away, to separate from. In this sense all painters and writers are abstract. They embrace from life and nature whatever inspires them and ignore facts and feelings that may distract or impede the fulfilment of their immediate purpose. The creative imagination freely deletes and adds, exaggerates and distils perceived reality. In any case, "No one can imitate nature," Picasso points out, "an artist can at best work with it."

Aristotle in the very beginning of the *Poetics*, his treatise on poetry and fine arts writes that all arts are, in their general conception, modes of imitation. His phrase, 'Art imitates nature' is oft-repeated as the Aristotelian doctrine for fine arts. As you read along the *Poetics* it becomes clear that Aristotle's statements can be misleading if read in isolation.

The reader may learn for instance that Aristotle does not differentiate between the fine and the utilitarian arts, and regards nature as not merely the outward, visible world of created things but as a creative force of the universe. It was in this sense that

art was required to imitate nature. The artist and poet were required to discern the underlying principles that make nature work and to act towards its realisation. This, he considered, was equally applicable to the functional or applied arts as well as science and social sciences.

Unfortunately, many architects and engineers unfamiliar with the proportions of the human body end up installing male urinals at level with the navel and not a foot lower where they should be thus causing considerable strain and mess. I am here also reminded of our great, inimitable A.R. Chughtai who preferred to keep women's mammary glands stay far up the rib box rather than allowing the pair to drape down over the thorax.

Aristotle further adds that the artist should not attempt mere imitation, "but portray things as they ought to be". A work of art for Aristotle is not a mere copy of things as they are but as they appear to the senses. The artist as well as a physician or a 'political animal' must at the same time be aware of the principles that guide nature. Without knowledge of human anatomy, the Greek and Italian painters and sculptors of Renaissance would not have been able to express their sense of beauty, anger, ecstasy, pathos and other human emotions.

The idea of imitation is connected in our mind to literal copying. What we call *lakeer da fakir* in our language. But there is another equally pertinent saying, '*Naqal kay liyay bhi aqal chaheyay*' (Even

imitation needs intelligence). As part of an apprentice's training, masters of miniature painting would make them copy human forms, animals and plants from classical works repeatedly till the student could render the attitudes and demeanour of images without inhibition. Once the essential skill and technique were acquired, the young artist could then be encouraged to observe record and capture nature, human character, action and feelings.

Some themes are repeated over and over again in Chinese and Japanese paintings. Innumerable painters for instance have rendered the plum blossom in winter over the centuries. The blossoming plum branch represents the courage to bear extreme trials in life. The plum is the harbinger of spring that dares to blossom without fear of the snows that have as yet not begun to melt. The intention of the artist is not to copy that same thing – plum blossom – but to reinterpret the old subject and express new feelings. It is an attempt not merely to put new wine in an old bottle but in the process subtly alter the bottle itself. Popular or traditional images, common myths and tales can be a valuable asset for artists and poets to express and convey individual ideas, feelings as well as collective concerns. Imitation therefore does not necessarily exclude self-expression. Even when an artist is trying to imitate or copy nature the reality he sees is coloured by his own particular vision. He sifts it during the very process of perceiving and rendering. The eye and the ear are abstract organs because they are conditioned by the symbolised data stored in the

mind. Even a conscious imitator in reality expresses himself.

In contemporary times the question is not of imitation but at what point 'self expression' leads to esotericism that is incommunicable to the average individual and how far this tendency is artistically laudable and socially defensible.

Art is a private act of self-expression which gives every artist or writer the right to do whatever pleases him. But speaking for myself I would rather stay close to collective existence, how so ever bitter and unbearable. I fear by withdrawing into themselves many of our very gifted and creative contemporary artists have lessened their work.

It is true that art is an independent activity of the mind. It is true that its end is distinct from education and task of moral improvement. It is also true that art enhances human awareness. I hate writers who insist on giving lectures on their work, but at the same time people would rather hear something they can comprehend than be baffled by an intimidating incomprehension. I would feel equally put-off if I were to intently gaze at an artwork in the hope that if I concentrated hard enough, I would understand its purpose. I have often seen honest individuals in European museums and galleries determined to extract meaning from trite tracts of modern painting as well as labouring over boring old brown canvases sanctified by art historians. Words have always been used to explain works of art. The difference is that

today words have become more dominant than the artworks. Many contemporary artworks today thrive on words, which are primarily employed to highlight the price they have fetched in the market rather than explain their artistic merit. In the last few decades, a language of art criticism has evolved that makes the viewer feel redundant and irrelevant instead of bringing him closer to the artwork. Art as usual is for the rich – to lend lustre and glamour to their public image. Since the middle of the last century the contradiction between art and the market has greatly sharpened.

Increasingly artists are producing works cynically. For artists, the world over, values expressed through art are becoming less relevant than the insistent demand of the market. Art today is no longer a matter of debate between the ancients and moderns, of public and private self-expression, of aesthetics and ideas, of form and content, image and non-figuration or of modernist definitions and post-modernist narratives. It is a matter of defining its purpose and *raison d'être*. It is an aesthetic as well as a question that concerns human sciences; best answered by the artists them self, keeping auctioneers and commercial gallery critics out of the discourse.

(7 Sept, 2005)

Art and Globalisation

Globalisation is being perceived today as a coercive force. Its most controversial aspect is the neo-liberal economic onslaught by the powerful, industrialised nations. It is heartening that perhaps for the first time the people of North and South have jointly demonstrated all over the globe, against the imposition of harsh and exploitative measures of GATT and WTO.

In the post-colonial era, the Third World has undergone two distinct phases. In the first phase they were made to feel that they were no longer at the bottom of the pit but on the fringes of the great cultural centres like Paris and New York. Before that - as a light-hearted aside, I recall, David Frost quipped in his talk show on the BBC in the early sixties, that racist South Africa had enforced a law by which the white keys in the pianos were separated from the black keys. A white person played the white keys and a black person played the black ones.

In the second phase, the word 'contemporary' was brought into circulation. In this phase, an artist aspiring to be 'contemporary' had to create global art

that had severed itself off its ethnic, national and regional ties. It was terribly homogenous, and bland like the food that is served by the airlines on international flights so as to appear slick but not offensive to any taste. Most contemporary art from New York to New Zealand or America to Asia looks the same. For an Asian artist to be admitted to this neutral, trans-national zone, he had yet again to get his/her visa endorsed by the West.

Let me add in passing that as a reaction to contemporary art, some artists and galleries reacted by mounting and promoting art that made virtue of ethnic and regional individuality. While this challenged the international monopoly of contemporary art, it tilted to the other extreme. Ethnic and regional identities are forged by the past and frozen in time. An artist while being a product of the past must overcome parochial limitations and aspire to have a larger and more composite human vision of him self and the world.

The Post-Modern period presents an alternative narrative and practice. Although it mocks the great European tradition of painting, in a way it liberated painting from highbrow pretentiousness of Modern Art. I remember when a stranger asked the Chinese Prime Minister Chou En Lai what he thought of the hippies, he responded by saying that there were many ways of expressing revolt against the establishment and that the hippie movement was one of the forms. In the sphere of the sartorial arts, it was revolt of the

Carnegie Street against the Seville Row. I remember as a student in 1962 quite unwittingly buying a rough cotton blue shirt worn by the slave farm labour in the southern American states, as a result of which my English friends at Cambridge regarded me, considerably *avant-garde*. But let's not forget that Post Modernism is a product of the inner crisis of Modernism or - in plain words - Capitalism, like the hippy movement was in the sixties. In these circumstances elephant dung displayed at the Tate Gallery in recent years is not going to hurt any one, although the question remains, as I pointed out on another occasion, which is the artist the elephant that defecated or the person who transported the shit at the Tate?

Incidentally, lest anyone forget, in the West, Capitalism is more sacred today than Christianity. An artist can immerse the Holy Cross into an empty jam bottle filled with his urine and display it without fear as a work of art on a street in Manhattan, but try offending the multinational monopolies or attacking their cultural and material assets and you will be regarded blasphemous, declared a terrorist and held in the Bay for the rest of your existence. Maybe that is the reason why the Western artists have - quite sensibly - agreed to work within the system. Democracy and Pluralism are eminent needs of Capitalism but for us they end where capitalism begins.

While Post Modernism attacks the *avant-garde*, highlights some social concerns such as minorities and gender issues, sexual preference, and defends marginal cultures, it trivialises cultural traditions and the high moral ground that modernism sought to defend.

For an artist from Asia to be Modern it is imperative for him to rely on his own perceptions and collective experience. Modernism as it emerged during and after the Great Wars, in its essence was neither a style nor a set of rules and forms. It was an invitation to an artist to be always ready to renew himself through his perceptions, awareness of his environment and information that relentlessly flows to him - often causing pain and provocation.

Globalisation is being perceived today as a coercive force. The most controversial aspect of globalisation is the neo-liberal economic onslaught by the powerful, industrialised nations. It is heartening that perhaps for the first time the people of North and South have jointly demonstrated all over the globe against the imposition of harsh and exploitative measures of GATT and WTO. The protest marked the beginning of global solidarity movement, which signifies an alternative type of globalisation.

Some intellectuals feel that cultural aspects of globalisation are rather problematic. The cultural nationalists, whether they are Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshis; Muslim fundos, Hindu fundos or the American Christian fundos and neo-conservatives,

find the spread of legitimate, liberal values threatening to their notion of cultural purity. An urgent need exists today to establish a cultural strategy in order to reinterpret and establish an alternative discourse to Modernism, The Contemporary and the Post-Modern narratives. That is where the Third World critics come in.

Some basic issues need to be particularly addressed: A) Why in our discourse do we have to accord centrality to the issues that are of concern to the artists in London, Paris or New York? B) Should our narrative not concern our own real issues and not be detracted by events and happenings in museums and galleries of affluent consumer societies. C) Should we not set our own agendas and priorities and not be swayed by the seemingly liberal neo-colonial deceptions that detract our artist from his role as a creative precursor of new ideas and dispenser of a vision of new human possibilities?

(This is the second part of the paper presented at the International Seminar hosted by the National Section of International Art Critics Association (AICA) on November 25-26, at Karachi. The first part appeared in this paper on December 14, 2004).

(22 Dec. 2004)

Art for the Sake of Art?

Colonialism had its negative and positive aspects. Among the few positives was that it shook the colonised from their stupor. It also inadvertently paved the way for science, new ideas and new technologies. In the preceding 1,000 years our scientific concerns were almost entirely centred on endeavours to convert base metals into gold and improve upon aphrodisiacs. The colonists in order to advance their own interests introduced new technologies and ideas. The railway network and the telegraph system were a welcome addition but also brought the sub-continent more firmly under the British heel. The public education system, while providing access to modern advancements in their own country enabled the colonists to establish their political and cultural dominance. It also raised a host of obedient *babus* of the state distanced from their own people. Emulating the ways of the coloniser - speaking their tongue and wearing their dress - was considered essential for success in the colonial era. Devising ingenious ways of expressing devotion to their rulers - as can be gathered from Lord Curzon's diary-became a literary pursuit.

Lord Curzon observes that ceremonial arches embellished with inscriptions "affords a much-valued scope for the talents of the local *babu* or university student". Once when he arrived at Chittagong in 'ordinary mufti' he was received with the compliment: He cometh as a bridegroom.

Clad in the garment of love.

At Murshedabad he was received with a quotation from an Indian sacred book:

Rejoice, o heart, in the advent of Messiah-like being

Representing a nobler one. Occasionally these inscriptions unintentionally caused considerable humour at the expense of the visiting colonial official. Curzon recounts that he was lucky to have been spared the particular welcome extended to an unusually ugly Governor, who on leaving the railway station read the inscription in gigantic characters over the gateway:

Good Lord! Deliver us!

On Curzon's arrival at Jaipur, accidental misplacing of the words, he records, made them "sound rather naughty".

A Gala Day appeared as A Gal a Day.

Lord Curzon observes that often the universal Anglo-Indian custom of condensing composite official titles into initials (for instance Agent to the Governor General became AGG) became a snare. On one

occasion a very popular officer on returning from leave to the state to which he was accredited, found the welcome extended to him on a triumphal arch expressed in the following abbreviated form:

Let us give a big WC.

To our popular AGG!

In arts the colonised underwent two distinct phases in the post-colonial era. In the first phase they were no longer regarded to be at the bottom of the pit - as they were persuaded to believe during the colonial period - but on the fringes of the great cultural centres of the West. Artists were censured if their work did not pay homage to Western ideals and concerns.

In the second phase the word 'contemporary' was brought into circulation. An artist aspiring to be contemporary was required to pander to the ideals of 'global' art personified by the American art establishment. To be contemporary an Asian artist had to sever himself off Asian ethnic, national and regional connections. The result was a terrible homogeneity and blandness, like the tasteless food served on international flights meant not to offend any taste bud; in the process please none. Most contemporary art from New York to New Zealand looks alike. To be admitted to this global paradise the Asian artist is required to get his or her visa endorsed by the West.

In reaction to this contemporary 'global art' many artists and galleries started patronising and promoting art that made virtue of distinctive features

of their traditional ethnicity. In challenging the international monopoly of contemporary art, it tilted to the other extreme. Ethnic and regional identities are forged by the past and frozen in time. All creative minds while acknowledging the past are impelled to stride over parochial concerns and strive to engage the world with which they interact. In their endeavour to resist the neo-colonial aims of contemporary art that limits the social function of art the artists and critics should not retreat but proceed ahead to create an alternate global vision that embraces common human concerns of the people and nations of the world today.

Post-Modernism - presuming Modernism is dead - presents an alternative narrative and practice. It mocks the great European tradition of painting that preceded it and claims to have liberated painting from highbrow Modern Art. But let's not forget that post-modernism is a product of the inner crisis of Modernism or capitalism - like the Hippy movement of the 1960s. I remember when a stranger asked Chinese Prime Minister Chou En Lai what he thought of the Hippies, he responded by saying that there were many ways of revolting against the establishment and that the Hippie movement was one such form. In the sartorial arts that addressed the upper classes it was the revolt of the Carnegie Street against the Seville Row. Thus, elephant dung displayed at the Tate ArtGallery in recent years acquires a significant meaning. Is Modern contemporary art being associated with shit? Even when the query has been

adequately answered, the question remains, which is the artist, the elephant or the person who transported the stuff from a captive elephant from the London Zoo to the Tate?

Let no one forget that in the West, capitalism is more sacred than Christianity. An artist can immerse a cross into an empty jam bottle filled with his urine and display it in Manhattan as a work of art, but dare not offend any of the multinational monopolies. That would be regarded blasphemous and branded as a terrorist fit for G-Bay. That may be the reason why the Western artists have (quite sensibly) agreed to work within the system? They say, if you cannot lick them join them.

While Post Modernism attacks the *avant-garde*, highlights some social concerns such as minorities, gender issues, sexual preference, and defends marginal cultures, it trivialises cultural traditions and the high moral ground Modernism espoused to defend. Art for Art's Sake was the best ideal that could be attained in a materialist age, because it was an unconscious protest against materialism and the demand that anything that did not have a practical value was valueless. It was artists' response to social realities they could no longer affirm.

For an artist from Asia to be Modern, it was imperative to rely on his own perception and collective experience. Modernism emerging during and after the World Wars was neither a style nor a set of rules. It was an invitation to the artist to be honest

to his perception. It was an invitation to establish a new aesthetic order and attack false values and social icons in order to restructure art and life. Even though much of modern art has lost its original motivation these ideals are relevant even today. For an Asian artist to be modern it is imperative not to ape styles and technical procedures associated with European Modern or Post- Modern art but to structure his work on his own perceptions and awareness of world realities.

Globalisation in art, commerce and politics today is being perceived as a coercive force. What is heartening is that perhaps for the first time the people of North and South have jointly held out against war and the neo- liberal economic onslaught by the industrialised nations. The protest marked the beginning of a global solidarity movement, which signifies an alternative globalisation. Some intellectuals feel that the cultural aspects of globalisation are rather problematic. The cultural nationalists - whether Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi; Muslims, Hindu, Christian and neo-conservatives, find the spread of legitimate liberal values threatening to their notion of cultural purity. In spite of these hurdles there is an urgent need today to establish a new cultural outlook and to reinterpret and establish an alternative discourse to Euro-centric narratives.

(Some of the thoughts in this article are from a paper read by the author at the International Seminar

hosted by National Section of International Art Critics
Association (AICA) on November 26, 2005 at Karachi)

Living the Moment

I must share with you part of a letter to my spouse from Cairo. It is from a young woman now named Mina. Once when she was a little girl, her mother in order to try to teach her learn how to handle money, asked her to go fetch two things from a shop. The mother stood some distance away watching over her. The little girl anxiously approached the counter, raised herself on her toes with money in hand and most politely asked the shopkeeper "*Jee*, give me a kilo of eggs and a dozen of flour". Now, she is a mother of two – a boy and a girl – and lives with her husband, Imran, currently posted in Cairo. How time flies? How seasons change?

Dry months of sizzling heat are tempered by Monsoon rains, winter follows summer and then there is spring that also fades away with inevitable predictability. Life goes on and is beguilingly the same. Bushes and trees, bud, flower and fruit; glaciers melt, rains sate the earth, rivers flow into the sea; boys and girls fall in love; birds nest, lay eggs and hatch babies. Things are eternally coming into being, growing and aspiring towards added existence.

I was up early yesterday and stepped into the garden. I was surprised to observe that our Daylilies were wide-awake on their long, flexible stems. I pulled up an old garden chair and settled down to draw the deportment of a blossom that seemed to shy away from me. It was the last on its stem. There was no other bud left to bloom. The one that had flowered the day before had shrivelled during the night and now hung from its stem like a bat. While I drew, I gathered from the evidence on the stem that there had been eleven blooms that preceded it. I observed rather intently but there was no trace of any concern on its fair yellow complexion that it was the last of the season. The Daylily swayed leisurely living the moment, without care for yonder or fear of the night, in cheerful certainty that it will be born again the next season.

I have never yet been to Egypt. In the past whenever I thought of the Nile; also thought of the pyramids, the pharaohs and the mummies. And ofcourse Nasser who in the early 1950s wrested the Suez Canal from the British. I was however most unhappy to learn that the great tomb of Abu Simbal would submerge in the lake formed by the Aswan Dam. It was a great relief to know when UNESCO intervened and raised the funds required to methodically dismantle and reassemble the Temple on higher ground to save it from drowning. The Egyptian government had argued that the Temple had to go because it was imperative to build the Dam, and

reclaim more land for cultivation in order to feed the growing population.

More often than not, what may seem unavoidable necessity is expressive of gross insensitivity and neglect to environment and human heritage. Destruction of the 4,000-year-old Temple for economic reasons would have been a criminal act as heinous as the destruction of the two 2,000-year-old statues of Buddha, carved out from the cliffs at Bamayan in Afghanistan.

Nature and human heritage must be preserved. We can destroy what is ours but we have no right to even tamper with what we have inherited. If we cannot add to it anything of our own, we must pass it on to the next generation what we have received it. Any "development" that adversely affects our environment and human heritage is to be shunned. If the environment is not respected it will react. A Central Asian writer has most aptly observed that people who shoot their past with a gun are destroyed by the future with cannon. The letter I mentioned at beginning presents a very different picture of Egypt to the one engraved in our mind - Nefertiti, Tutankhamen and Hosni Mubarak. Here are some parts of the letter:

"*Assalam-e-Alaikum*. Hope you are all well. We have finally settled into our new home and have got the email running...

"The weather is really beautiful these days. After the laden *sumbal* flowers, Maadi [a section of Cairo]

has burst into a profusion of flowering *katchnaar*. It is a sight for sore eyes. There are avenues of flowering trees with shades of white to pale pinks; lilacs and purple, each more glorious than the other. I wish you could witness the spectacle. Now I see latent jacaranda trees sprouting tiny green leaves. I have even spotted *Gulmohar* and Laburnum trees. It seems when one tree is through with its exhibition the next one is ready for the show! Let me not forget to mention the mango trees in our own garden that seem all set for a healthy fruiting season." [Doesn't this seem as though someone was writing about Lahore?]

"Now the city is already ablaze with jacaranda flowers, literally avenues full of them. Cairo is a truly beautiful place. The weather is holding up quite well even now and evenings actually get chilly."

"I am so fed up with staring into my garden and thinking if *Abbu* was here, he would paint this like this, and paint that like that, that I have finally broken out of my slumber and taken to painting myself. Of course, with not quite the same results! Sitting back and observing nature I find I am so affected by *Abbu's* particular vision and can't help looking at things from that angle only [All daughters fancy their fathers. Don't they?]. I am trying to finish a painting I started in Karachi of a variegated *Ficus* plant as luckily, I found a reference in my garden. I have run into a bit of difficulty with the background. I hope I don't end up messing it all because I have spent a lot of time on it. You will be happy to know that I have also purchased

a canvas and some turpentine oil so possibilities are that I may be starting something new as well!

"*Bachchas* are well and really enjoying their school [this is a part that may not interest other parents but let me nevertheless share it with you]. They come home at four since they have swim-team practice. Sometimes Imran and I just sit and look at them and can't believe how fast they have grown... Is that what all parents do?"

Well, I say why not? The other day a friend of mine said that he wished he had been a grandfather before becoming a parent. He believed he would have been a better father and enjoyed his children's childhood more fully. Briefly the news sent by the mother from Lahore to Cairo was as follows:

"You cannot imagine what a pleasure it was to read your letter... I cannot match the brilliance of your description and the beautiful surroundings that they conjure up for us. I can only give you the mundane news of events around us. I felt proud and happy to hear about you, Tania and Mustafa. It is exciting that your vision is developing along *Abbu's* lines. I can't wait to see the results. Otherwise things are the same here. *Khalu* is, as you know, not well. Mazhar left after one month's stay but Amina has stayed behind for another 15 days. They are all tense and upset though *Khala* seems to be calm, too calm I feel. We can only pray for them. May God help them for it is a trying time indeed?"

Life goes on. The Daylilies sway leisurely living the moment, without a care for yonder or fear of the night, in cheerful certainty that they will be born again the next season.

(10 May, 2006)

'Be Careful in the Future'

Surrendering to anarchism seems

to be the only honest and honourable pursuit for individuals. Politics, religion and art are conspiracies to boggle human sanity. Organised faiths, nation states and patriotism – in good or bad faith – are deceptive; they would rather sniff their own armpits than uphold abstract virtues. The scent of evil often smells more seductive than aroma of good blended with honest sweat.

Recently the police arrested 9 dancers, 14 actresses and 300 spectators for “vulgarity” at Gujrat. Deciding what is vulgar reminds me of the five blind men who tried to describe an elephant. One silly blind fellow mistook the elephant’s trunk for an awesome something else. So, let’s leave the matter of vulgarity rest at that. It is individual perception. I feel it was impolite to embarrass the ladies.

What is wrong with shaking the bum if it does not lead to a riot? In any case what the police should be working on these days are not bums but bombs. Confucius will bear me out that in history bums have

never caused mentionable damage to anyone, even to those who cannot afford better entertainment.

There are people in our country who declare the drumbeat to be *haram*. *Basant* (kite festival) is a heresy because it is supposedly a Hindu festival. Fortunately cricket, hockey and tennis are not regarded as non-Muslim sports. These people forbid most pleasures and recreational activities either as *haram*, heretical, unpatriotic or vulgar. On their list the most vulgar item is of course the woman – the cause of all abuse, aberrations, feuds and evil. The most pious or frenzied zealots however will not for a moment bear the thought of existence without them – and lots of them – here or in heaven. Not once did Adam plead to God to forgive Eve and allow Adam to suffer for their sins – after all it was not Eve but Adam who ate the apple. Adam knew that without Eve's companionship he would pine away on earth.

Without the vigilant Eve, a passing beast would have made a morsel of him. Together with Eve, Adam was able to make men like him and women like Eve.

For millenniums man believed that women made men and that man played no role in his own making. Man was mystified by woman's magical power and worshipped her as Mother Goddess. How devious of women to have kept the secret for hundreds of years.

Without men and women indulging each other and procreating, the human race would not have come into existence. I wonder then why copulation between

two consenting adults is regarded with disfavour. Perhaps it is because sexuality - as opposed to sex - is a primordial emotion that has not been intelligently and publicly discussed and fathomed. It can be more potent than patriotism; it is more voracious than mere love. It is not *raison d'être* of creation but a vital force for human propagation and survival.

I imagine enhanced sexuality, like aesthetic awareness, can only make society richer and the world a safer and better place to live in. Would you agree that sexuality is a better human emotion than greed, hate, sadism or urge to steal or lie? I wonder why the police should dash to a place where reportedly a woman is awkwardly dancing to an audience, which at best can only be an aesthetic offence? Why don't they rush to stop rape or armed robbery, which are criminal offences? Last Friday, a guesthouse was attacked by the youth wing of a religious party for being used as a brothel. According to a newspaper report, the JI had started campaigning against rest houses two months earlier to stir up religious sentiments and get more votes for their candidates in the local elections. The police found no evidence that the guesthouse was a brothel.

The same news item reported that instead of apprehending the criminals who assaulted the place, the concerned SHO persuaded the owner of the guesthouse to convert the guesthouse into a marriage hall or rent it out as office space. Instead of protecting

the owner from the criminals, the SHO prevailed upon the owner to close the guesthouse. Why?

The Gujrat 'vulgarity case' and the guesthouse 'brothel case' highlight the Hasba Bill being criminally implemented in the Punjab. Individually or collectively, interference in the life of an individual is legally unacceptable and should be discouraged.

Laws should be faithfully and firmly enforced and not left to the personal whims of the Law enforcement agents. To illustrate how frequently the law is enforced – when enforced – I am reminded of an incident. In the late 1980s I was commissioned to paint historical sites. I felt challenged to do something other than my usual concerns. In the past thanks to European painters like Simpson, Harding, Harcourt, Carter and some others who had rendered paintings, etchings and lithographs on the subject. "Should I not make a contribution by rendering a few canvases on subjects that were part of my heritage?" I asked myself. I would never have a better opportunity.

One of these undertakings took me to Emperor Jehangir's tomb across the River Ravi at Shahdara. As usual at the end of one day, I packed my canvas, paint box and easel and was walking back, when I saw a young man arguing with a policeman. A few paces away stood an embarrassed and unhappy young lady in a *burqa* with the veil thrown back.

"She may be your wife, but where is the *nikahnama*?" insisted the policeman. Finding me in close proximity he threw a glance in my direction and

added for my benefit, "They come with dames and upon being questioned claim that they are married." I pleaded, "*Yaar* (buddy) *Mauj karan dey* (Let them have fun)."

To my surprise without further ado, he let them off with the admonishment, "Be careful in the future." I felt so good.

(10 August, 2005)



Ijaz ul Hassan is a recipient of two presidential awards. The Pride of Performance Award received in 1991 and the Sitara e Imtiaz award received in 2015. He is a painter, a teacher, a writer, a poet, an organiser of art exhibitions and many other things. He wrote one of the first books on Painting in Pakistan that is now printed in the eighth edition.

He has had a seven decades long career as a painter. He is regarded as one of the most well known and popular painters of Pakistan. The paintings that embellish the cover of the books in hand are a testament to his abilities as a painter. One of his paintings is now owned by the Fukouka Asian Art Museum of Japan.

The advent of a new century brought forth his talent as a writer. For three long years he produced popular weekly articles, printed in these two books for the 'Lahore Daily Times'. He Also wrote a number of articles for 'The Friday Times'.

During these years he also expressed himself in verse in English, Urdu and Punjabi.

Apart from his literary pursuits, he was also the founder member and later the President of the Artists Association of Pakistan, that is the only art organisation that has regularly held art exhibitions and seminars consecutively for thirty six years. Many of these exhibitions were national exhibitions and Ijaz wrote learned and well researched forewords for most of the brochures produced with the exhibitions. These brochures are a good resource for those seeking archival material on the art of the years between 1986 to 2024.

Ijaz ul Hassan has been on the governing bodies of major institutions and was part of the two policy framing bodies on Art, established by the Government of Pakistan.